

SORTING GATE

Simple records, big impacts

by Kelli Retallick, Angus Genetics Inc.



Cattle producers have a lot to manage. With winter management in full swing, producers

are inevitably starting to plan for spring calving season, planting season and summer forage management. Adding one more thing to the “to-do” list almost seems impossible.

What if you could take some of the pressure off next year by having a data bank to support your decisions? It could help set yourself up for success in coming years.

Keeping records is not always the most appealing job. After all, you chose to be a cattle producer to go out and work with your hands every day, not sit behind a computer. Yet recordkeeping can help you in making the best management decisions for your herd and can even help increase ranch profitability.

Keep it simple

When starting to keep records, keep it simple. As a commercial cow-calf producer, you only have so much time in the day. When it comes down to it, the cows have to be fed and waterers checked, so keep it simple.

Start with the easy stuff. Keep an active, accurate inventory list of your herd. Record your pregnancy data for your active females each year. When you cull a female, add a note to her at the end of the day explaining why you got rid of her.

Over time, recognizable patterns may arise. You may start to uncover families that tend to leave the herd faster or that continuously come up open in the fall. Recognizing these patterns and ridding the herd of these unwanted genetics could help improve your

bottom line, by not wasting resources on females that will only leave you disappointed in the end.

Next, think about keeping a calving book and try to identify calves at or near birth. We realize this is easier said than done sometimes. Having calving records consisting of calf and dam identification (ID), birth origin, calving or dystocia scores, and death loss can help make culling decisions later on.

Keeping a calving book also provides a consistent place to record if and

when health protocols were administered, and tracking if calves were doctored for incidences of pneumonia or scours, for example.

Other information

Starting with individual animal ID and herd inventory can set producers up to collect even more valuable data points. Adding sire information to the calving book could be a valuable tool. Knowing which bulls are providing the quality progeny could help you determine if you are on track to reach your genetic goals. Collecting performance data — like birth and weaning weights, or even market weights — can provide even further insight into whether or not you are reaching your desired levels of genetic gain.

Having this information in hand can sure make the bull-buying season a bit less stressful. As commercial producers, your bull suppliers can provide you with several tools to help you make your decisions, but it is a lot easier to put those tools to use when you know what you have and where you want to go. If, through data

recording, you find you still have to pull more calves than you would like, then tracking the bull battery and their average calving ease direct (CED) EPDs can be useful to benchmark what type of bulls you need to purchase this spring.

Maybe you are on track and do

not have to worry about calving difficulty, but find when you pregnancy-check your females in the fall, too many of your heifers are coming up open. In that case maybe you do not need to place as much emphasis on CED, but rather more on heifer pregnancy (HP) EPDs to try to move your herd forward. Whatever it is, producers need to know where their individual herds are in order to move forward, and simple recordkeeping initiatives can help do just that.

Get started

While everyone will approach recordkeeping in a different way, producers can look at several different tools to fit their needs. A simple calving book may do the trick. To take it a step further, producers can look at several different computer software options available on the market today.

The American Angus Association launched its “Black Book” app, built with the commercial producer in mind, late last year. The application, which can be downloaded on a smartphone, allows for multiple logins so everyone on the ranch can record information. It has features to record all of the information listed above and much more.

The best thing a producer can do is start. Having records can help turn those stress-driven decisions into a functional decision-making plan and enables successful planning for both long- and short-term goals. |

Editor's note: “Sorting Gate” is a regular *Angus Beef Bulletin* column featuring herd improvement topics for commercial producers using Angus genetics. Authored by staff of Angus Genetics Inc. (AGI), regular contributors include Dan Moser, president; Stephen Miller, director of genetic research; and Kelli Retallick, director of genetic service. For additional information on performance programs available through the American Angus Association and AGI, visit www.angus.org and select topics under the “Management” tab.

