

# FIT FOR COMPARISON

## MU Extension pilots beef recordkeeping project.

by Linda Geist, University of Missouri

University of Missouri (MU) Extension began a three-year project in March 2020 to help beef producers improve whole-herd recordkeeping.

MU Extension specialists in Columbia, Albany and Savannah worked with three northwestern Missouri producers to record and compare whole-herd production data, explains livestock specialist Shawn Deering. By comparing individual and herd data to regional and national standards, they hope to help producers decide which cows to keep and which ones to cull.

Specialists collected data on cows and calves. They evaluated age, breed, weight, body condition score (BCS), disposition and days pregnant, if available. They

gathered birth date, breed, sex, dam, sire (if available) and weight on calves. They used these data to monitor herd and individual animal performance in northwestern Missouri herds.

“Early data collection has already generated some interesting



information related to mature cow weight,” Deering says.

Specialists compared data from the 500 head of cows to accepted industry standards, he says. National industry standards may differ greatly from regional herd data.

For example, producers, veterinarians, beef nutritionists and university experts accept 1,200 pounds (lb.) as the industry standard. However, cows used in this project weighed from 662 lb. to 1,730 lb.

“That is a 1,068-pound difference between the lightest cow weighed and the heaviest cow,” Deering says.

The lightest animal was a first-calf heifer, and the heaviest was a 7-year-old mature cow.

“Obviously, the age gap does

explain part of the difference, but that is still a wide range,” he says.

Environment, forage base and marketing plan should all factor into the ideal cow size for individual producers, says Deering. Bigger cows consume more feed and cost more to maintain.

“Our hope is that this project will give us a good idea of current average cow size in northwest Missouri and serve as a guide to determine what the ideal for our area might be,” he says.

For more information on the project, contact MU Extension veterinarian Craig Payne, 573-882-7848; state beef nutritionist Eric Bailey, 573-884-7873; livestock specialist Jim Humphrey, 816-324-3147; or livestock specialist Shawn Deering, 660-726-5610. |

Editor's note: Linda Geist is a strategic communications associate for the University of Missouri College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources.