

Chapter 1 – General Management

Management practices will deliver or derail genetic potential with respect to carcass quality. We'll look at health and nutritional management in their own sections of this manual, but here is a basic foundation.

Record Keeping

The old saying, “You can't manage what you don't measure,” holds true. Therefore, to make progress and profit in the cattle business, records must be kept.

Establish a system for herd recordkeeping, using programs from companies, producer organizations or Extension education services. They incorporate varying levels of technology from wireless or self-entry on your computer to mail-in sheets of handwritten ledgers. Use a system that you can easily and accurately maintain and remember, it doesn't have to be “high tech.” The Angus Beef Record Service (BRS) provides a system for commercial cattle producers to keep herd management and performance records on their animals. For more information, visit www.beefrecords.com

- Individually identify (ID) your cows, as a prerequisite to meaningful records. If they are not currently identified, you can change that the next trip through the chute for pregnancy evaluations or vaccines. Be sure to identify purchased or retained replacement heifers.
- Individually ID calves soon after calving. At a minimum, keep records of calving date, sex and dam. Add the sire, pasture, calving ease code and birth weight if you can.
- An ear tag is likely the most practical form of identification. Whether you choose the basic numbered panel or electronic ID, use the system that best fits your plans. Some marketing decisions start with a calfhood tag.
- Record all management practices, such as medical treatments and vaccinations. Make sure to record date, products and dosages.
- Pocket-sized herd record books are easy to carry, but also easy to lose. Maintain a backup record system in an office ledger or computer.
- Maintain easy access to records for at least five years and archive older records.

Calving Season

- Establish one or two periods of calving rather than continuous.
- Calve in a 60- to, at most, 90-day window and gain two benefits—a more effective vaccination program and more appealing calves for feedlot buyers. Vaccines are less effective spanned across varied ages and weight ranges can surpass 200 pounds (lb.) as calving intervals grow.
- Consider breeding heifers to calve 30 to 45 days before the mature cowherd. This allows first-calf heifers that miss a cycle at rebreeding to stay in the main calving season. This strategy also lets you focus labor needs at calving time.
- Consider heat synchronization in combination with artificial insemination (AI) to enable use of highly proven sires. Adapt programs that fit your management and facilities.

Disposition

Research has shown that nervous or excitable cattle have more health problems than other cattle. They also risk injury to handlers, damage equipment and end up with lower carcass quality.

- Flighty or excitable cows should be culled from the herd, and their daughters should not be retained as replacements.
- Care should be taken not to introduce nervous or excitable herd sires or replacement heifers into the herd.
- Design your handling facilities to work with cow psychology and minimize stress.
- Spend time on foot with the cowherd so that cattle are accustomed to humans.
- Move and handle cattle calmly, quietly and slowly.