



Time and money

By Miranda Reiman

Cutting back, lowering inputs, pinching pennies—they've all become catch phrases, a result of the recent recession. But before you tighten the belt on your cowherd or scale back on management, health or nutrition, be sure to weigh the impact.

Being cost conscious pays in any economic climate, but you can only cut so much across the board before you cause harm. The secret is to get the most out of all inputs.

Efficiency boils down to curtailing waste. That often means less feed or labor in some area of your operation, since those are two big inputs. Savings there equals fewer dollars down the drain.

The first step to reaching peak performance is tracking where you've been. If you don't have production numbers it's hard to make comparisons or data-driven decisions. You don't need to make a complicated record-keeping system, just make sure it includes all the variables that make a difference. Calving percentages, sale weights and health programs are a place to start. As you build on this, individual identification can help with culling decisions, bull buying and even marketing.

That may seem like an unnecessary expenditure of time, but long-term it'll help you set goals and prioritize. You can focus on the most significant places to make improvements, saving time and headaches later.

Tightening your calving season might help inch up the efficiency. By paring down the number of days spent in that hectic period of sleep-deprived high-alert time, you can spend the rest of the months completely centered on other aspects of your cattle business. It'll probably provide extra income, too, because the more uniform the group, the higher price they'll fetch at the sale barn.

As you're gathering calves or keeping those long summer hours in the hayfield, seize each moment by thinking of ways to achieve greater efficiency. (That multi-tasking in itself will help.) Workable ideas will vary from ranch to ranch. Could you invest in equipment or facilities to save time and effort? Maybe you need to be more proactive in your health program so less work and money are spent treating sick calves.

Walk through your entire production calendar. How much time do you spend bull shopping? Do your homework ahead of time. Study EPDs (expected progeny differences) and cow families; then try to amass a list of favorite sires before you mark the sale catalogs and head out to bid. Being prepared could encourage you make selections that are a better fit for your herd. It also helps curb impulse purchases that could cause problems for years to come.

What is your grazing situation like? If you move up weaning, maybe you'd save a little grass for your cows and push winter feeding later. Or possibly you're in the land of expansive pastures and your cattle aren't utilizing every nook and cranny. Could you install waterers or a dividing fence to entice them?

There are dozens of questions you can ask yourself about the efficiency of every aspect of your farm or ranch. So ask them, find answers and then act.

The buzz these days is all about spending less. Sometimes there is nowhere left to cut spending without cutting your future, so work at getting more for your time and money.

Think of it as stretching your dollar.

Next time in *Black Ink*, Steve Suther will look at finding fault. Meanwhile, if you have questions for us, call toll-free at 877-241-0717 or e-mail mreiman@certifiedangusbeef.com.

END