AIMS Tech Notes

by Scott Johnson, director of Angus Information Management Software

Changing a user field for each animal

As I began to write this column, I realized that when you read it we will "finally" be in the year 2000 (still not a new millennium, but that's a different topic). Congratulations for surviving the changeover to 2000. After all the hype, it's almost certain you have run into unexpected problems with Y2K, but I am also betting it's not the doomsday that some would have us believe here in early December 1999.

Q. *How can I change a user field for each animal in the pen?*

A. First, a quick review of the user fields' purpose. AIMS 2.0 has 10 fields that can be defined by users to mean anything they want. This gives you a way to store data that is unique to your operation or has a special purpose to which you want easy access. For example, perhaps you want to designate the animals in your next production sale as *2000.* You can use a selected user field — let's assume the first one for this example — and put *2000* in that field for every animal in the pen.

Assuming you already have a pen made up of these animals, let's change the value of the first field for every animal.

Open the pen, then go to the Pen command, then Pen Update. The Pen Update window will display the 10 user fields plus the Active/Inactive field. The first step is to enter *2000* as the value for User Field 1. You can use the down arrow at the end of the field to see all of the currently used values and select from that list. You also need to determine how you want AIMS to treat the field during the update process. There are three options for each user field:

OVERWRITE: The value you entered, *2000* in this case, will be put in the user field no matter what was already in the field, if anything. Use this when you don't know and don't care what else might be there from previous entries.

PROMPT FIRST: If you're not sure whether there could be previously entered values in the field, use this option. During the update process, if AIMS finds a value already there, it will ask you whether you want to overwrite it or not. If the field was previously empty, it will get the new value without asking. Use this option when there may be a good reason for a previous value — for example, the animal was already in the 1999 sale (so it probably shouldn't be in this pen anyway). When you are prompted, you will have options for "Yes" meaning change this specific animal, "No" to skip this animal and leave it alone, "Yes to All" to go ahead and finish the rest of the pen (which is basically the same as the Overwrite option earlier), or you can Cancel the process.

IGNORE: This is the default option since it's the safest setting. It tells AIMS to ignore this field altogether.

Once you have entered the value and determined the update option, simply click on the "Apply to All in Pen." Actually, it means "apply to all in the pen according to the options I set up above." If you requested a prompt, it will prompt. If you didn't request the prompt, it puts in the value for all animals after asking for one more verification.

It is also possible that you will want to blank out previous data in a user field. In this case, simply Overwrite (or Prompt First) every animal's selected user field value with an empty value. A special dialog box will verify that this is your intention.

The Pen Update screen also allows you to change all of the animals to either "Active = Yes" or "Active = No," with the same Overwrite and Prompt First options.

Last but not least, you can even change the label for each user field, so that instead of its being labeled as "User Field 1:" it can be "Sale Year." The change needs to be done back on a regular animal (not on the Pen Update screen), then simply double click on the label, not the value, and enter up to 12 characters for the new label. This is also a good idea so that you'll use a user field for the same purpose for all animals in AIMS.

Note on registrations

As you may have discovered, the Association sends out suspense letters for any animals that cannot be registered — for a variety of reasons. In most cases, you will be able to enter the information on your computer that will fix the problem; for example, sire ownership differences mean the calf needs to be marked AI, embryo removal dates need to be entered for embryo transfer (ET) calves and a variety of other situations. To fix the problem(s), it's much easier for all parties if you fix the information on your computer and resend the registration export file. Our data-entry department will be able to avoid retyping information, and your records will be more accurate by not doing the corrections by phone.

By the way, AIMS 2.0 will do a validation check on registration exports to help ensure the vast majority of the information is correct. It can't check everything, but it helps you avoid the easy mistakes.

Denver demos

As in past years, I'll be staffing a booth at the National Western Stock Show. I'll be in the Angus booth just outside the ring during "the Hill" show days (Jan. 12, 13 and 14). I'm also investigating setting up a table in the sale barn where the pen and carload shows are held on Saturday, Jan. 15. In any case, I'll be there to answer questions, explain features, or just to meet you in person. Stop by when you have a chance.

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