

# VETERINARY CALL

by Bob Larson, Kansas State University

## Measuring to Manage

*The idea that a rancher can only manage what can be measured is commonly repeated.*

I agree good measurements certainly help when the goal is to make better management decisions. Veterinarians working with beef cattle producers often desire records to assist assessing production efficiency. This helps in the investigation of disease outbreaks, and is a component of Beef Quality Assurance (BQA).

### The goal

The financial objective for a cow-calf herd is to maximize the total income divided by total costs. While that goal is straight forward, simply measuring total income and total costs does not provide information about the individual decisions directly under the rancher's control.

The most important information when evaluating the income side of a ranching business has to do with reproductive efficiency. This includes the percentage of cows that start the breeding season pregnant at preg-check time, and the percentage of the cows that become pregnant during the first 21 days of breeding season.

I am also interested in knowing the percentage of cows that lose their pregnancy between preg-check and calving, and the loss of live-born calves between calving and weaning. The total number of calves weaned per cow exposed for breeding is a valuable measurement

of reproductive efficiency and herd health. An even more precise measurement would be total dollar value of calves sold per cow exposed for breeding.

On the expense side, the total grazing costs as well as purchased feed costs will account for most of the expenses for the herd. By looking at each cost area individually, comparisons to herd goals can be made by the producer.

When veterinarians investigate disease outbreaks, various information is important. This includes which cattle got sick or died, age of cattle affected, observed behavior the rancher saw that caused concern, the date an animal was first identified as sick or died, and which pasture or lot the sick animals were housed in prior to being identified. These can all be used to look for patterns in age, location, dam age, or other characteristics that help identify the events that led up to the disease problem.

Any information about individual sick cattle or outbreaks of disease should be kept for several years so that if a similar problem reoccurs, accurate information is available.

### BQA

BQA involves numerous aspects of cattle management that directly

affect the quality of beef products sold to consumers as well as the health and welfare of the herd. Accurate documentation of all events from the time of birth through the production phases is becoming the expected level of record-keeping.

Whenever a vaccine, dewormer, fly control, antibiotic or other product is administered to cattle, you should record the exact name of the product, the serial number of the product you purchased, the dose that was administered, and how the cattle were treated (i.e. by mouth, in the muscle, under the skin, etc.).

Information and measurements needed to evaluate reproductive efficiency, disease outbreaks, and all products used should be collected in a way that is simple and complete.

Records that allow you to easily and accurately evaluate the overall productivity of your herd as well as individual components of herd efficiency can be a tremendous advantage when making management decisions. **AJ**

*Editor's note: Robert L. Larson is a professor of production medicine and executive director of Veterinary Medicine Continuing Education at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kan.*