



Tech Notes

► by **Scott Johnson**, director of Angus Information Management Software

Using electronic weights with AIMS

A scale manufacturer representative recently contacted me about the possibility of using an electronic scale-head to update the weights in Angus Information Management Software (AIMS). Several AIMS users had asked him if this could become a feature of AIMS and/or the scale. Well, it turns out that feature has been a part of AIMS for several years; here's the scoop.

Capturing weight data

A variety of companies are manufacturing scales with some type of electronic output, which is a short step from creating a file that can be imported into the computer. Each company has a slightly different idea of how to capture, identify and store the data; and each herd recordkeeping program has a different way to process and store the data.

The issue is that older electronic scale control panels do not allow alphabetic characters, in other words, they can only create numeric identifications (IDs). This, of course, is a problem for tattoos and tags since many include some type of nonnumeric character.

Create the 'weights link'

The basic premise of a weights link in AIMS is that a pen of animals is given a temporary ID number that AIMS will store for future use. The ID creates the link between the animal's actual tattoo and its numeric-only entry at the scale-head. To open the main Weights screen, choose File | Data | Create Weights Link and a screen will appear with the following instructions.

- Step 1.** Select the pen of animals you are going to weigh, and click Create IDs.
- Step 2.** Print out the resulting report.
- Step 3.** If you are going to weigh multiple pens, check the Multiple Pens check box and repeat steps 1 and 2 for each pen.
- Step 4.** During this pen's weighing session, enter the ID from the report into the electronic scale for the corresponding animal.

- Step 5.** When weighing is done, import the resulting file using the Update Weights option from the Import/Export menu.

The first column of the report is ID — this is the number to use on the scale unit as each animal crosses the scale. It is "linked" to the tattoo stored in AIMS. The report printed in Step 2 can be used as a worksheet to manually record weights, therefore serving as a backup of the valuable weight data.

Once the animals have actually been weighed with an electronic scale-head and the resulting file is brought back, probably on disk, to the main AIMS computer, you're ready to update the weights using File | Data | Update Weights.

Importing the weights file

Here are the steps for updating weights (which also appear on the screen).

- Step 1.** When weighing is done, create a file of weights from your electronic scale. (This process can vary depending on the scale manufacturer. See the manufacturer's instructions for more help.)
- Step 2.** Click Browse to find the file either on a floppy disk or already somewhere on your computer.
- Step 3.** Select the type of weights measured. (The four choices are weaning, yearling, second yearling and extra weights. Also, be sure to put in the weigh date that is to be used for these records.)

- Step 4.** Select the scale type — if it doesn't exist in the list, define the import file by clicking Create Profile.

- Step 5.** Click Import to finish.

The Scale Profile is a method to "teach" AIMS how the weight data file will be formatted as determined by the scale-head. Since different scale companies, and even different models of scales, could format their data differently, AIMS needs this step to learn. Of course, we are assuming the scale-head has a mechanism to create and save a data file, which can either be transferred to the AIMS computer by disk or direct cable hookup.

AIMS includes one default profile for Tru-Test® scales. The file format was taken from documentation for one of their scales. You may need to modify this format for different Tru-Test scale models or create a new profile depending on the brand and model of scale you are using. Refer to the AIMS Help file for more information on creating profiles. You may also need the scale's user manual, or contact the AIMS Department for help creating these profiles.

Updated help file

A new Help file for AIMS is now available. During the last several months, I have been drastically updating the existing Help file. The new file, which also uses a more current form of Help file formatting, is available for download from the AIMS Web site at www.angus.org/aims. The Help file is also used to create the printed manual, which can be downloaded and either printed or viewed as a pdf file.

Once the Help file is copied to the c:\aims20 folder and AIMS is updated to version 2.3, build 118 (or higher), the new Help file will be used whenever clicking on the Help command in AIMS.

E-MAIL: scottj@angus.org