

# Computer Advice for Cattlemen— The Key Word is “Hands-On”

by Glenn Nader  
Lassen County Farm Advisor, Susanville, Calif.

*“Find a neighbor, friend, local community college or someone with a micro computer and try it out,” says Glenn Nader. “Get some hands-on experience. Interact. Push aside your phobia.”*

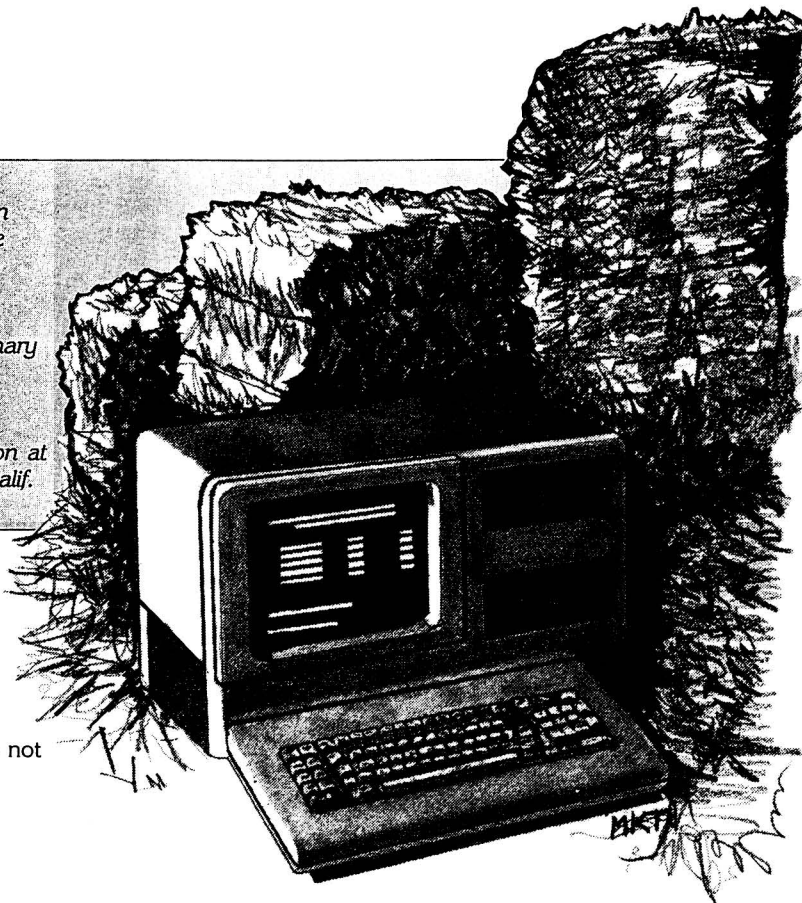
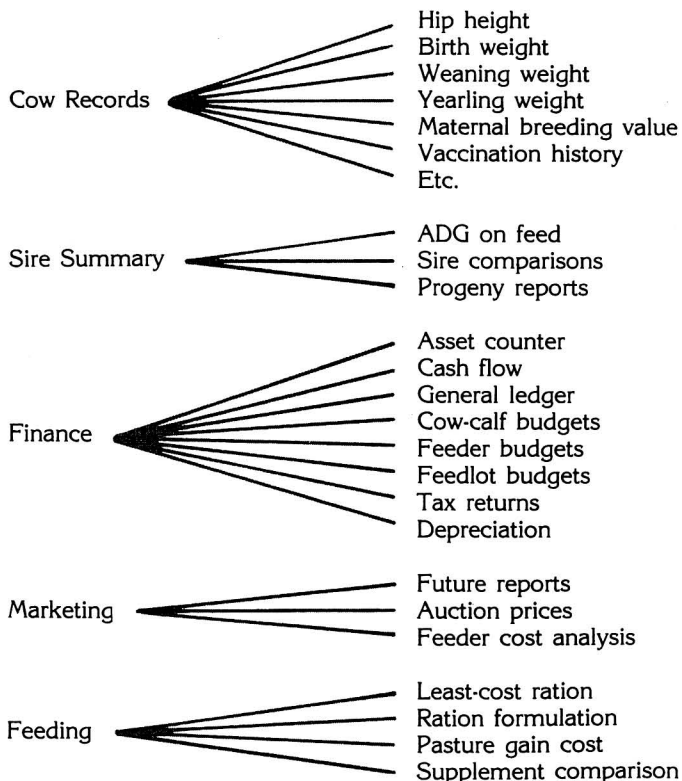
*The Lassen County farm advisor conducts several programs each year to familiarize cattlemen with micro computers and available software. The following is a summary of his presentation during the Oakdale Livestock Forum, Oakdale, Calif. The lists included are not intended to be complete; they simply provide a sample of available information. Feel free to contact Nader for further information at the University of California Memorial Building, Susanville, Calif. 96130.*

**Two major thoughts** (Before you read the rest of this computer information, think.)

- Think software, not computers!
- Think records before computers!

## Choosing software

- Ask what chores you want it to do. Programmers do not know your needs.
- Diagram it out:



**First things first** (To make an investment in computers work you need three things.)

- **Good records!** You must provide accurate numbers for the computer to give you an accurate answer. The old saying still goes “garbage in, garbage out.” There is no sense having a computer if you are going to guess at what it costs you to run that old cow.
- **Basic understanding of computers.** This is best learned by doing, since reading to educate yourself is a sure way to fall asleep. Take a weekend course to learn basic operation of a computer and spread sheets, then put it to use at home with someone to call when you’re in trouble.
- **Concept of what decision can and will be made from the numbers produced by the computer.** This is how you really find out if you need or can use a computer in your operation. Define where it will be used—i.e., cash flow, weaning information, general ledger, or break even feeder costs. Then decide what end product figures you need and if there is software available to provide these figures.

**Things computers will not do** (These are things to think about when the white-vinyl-shoe computer salesman talks to you.)

- They won’t make management decisions. They provide numbers on which to base decisions.

- They won't provide magical numbers. They will require records.
- They won't stand alone. They need a good manager.
- They won't operate without someone having knowledge in computers.
- They won't answer all of your questions.

#### Things computers will do

- Crunch/calculate numbers
- Save time
- Provide accurate information
- Store information
- Organize information

#### Specifically

- Accounting—production costs, cash flow, ledger, check book, tax forms, inventory
- Livestock—ration formulation, performance evaluation, housing (swine), records, marketing (break even, hedges, milk production, cow cost)
- Crops—sprayer calibrations, least-cost fertilizer, crop comparisons, soil loss, irrigation
- Spread Sheets—"what if" predictions, records, letters
- Word Processing

#### Hardware buying check list

- Amount of software available!
- Does it have CP/M capabilities?
- Company service, advice and distance from your operation
  - At least 64K of memory
  - Can you increase the K (storage capacity) in the future?
  - Longevity of the company
  - User groups in your area

#### Dos and don'ts

- Always buy a voltage regulator to be placed between the wall plug and the computer. Voltage fluctuation can cause damage to your machine.
- Keep computer away from dust and smoke. They wear on the disk drives and short out circuits.
- Do not allow food or drink near the computer. Liquid on the keyboard will cause complete loss.
- When working in a carpeted area, short yourself out on metal before touching the computer to keep stray voltage from occurring.

#### Disk handling tips

- Do not write on a disk except with a felt tip pen.
- Keep disk away from:
  1. Heat (they will melt)
  2. X-rays
  3. Magnets
  4. Moisture
- Disks need to be used under a relatively constant temperature. Variation of only 40 degrees F. will cause them to shrink and swell.
- Always make three copies of every disk you buy.
  1. Library copy to be stored in a separate place in case of fire or theft
  2. Father copy, backup to working copy
  3. Son copy, working copy
- Buy a holder and catalog disks for safety and organization.

#### Private software

- Apple
  1. Vanloves software directory (\$24.95) includes 75 ag programs that range in cost from \$50 to \$2,500.
  2. Agri leader (\$390) is a complete ag-financing package. It can be obtained from Small Business Computer Systems, 4140 Greenwood, Lincoln, Neb. 68504.

3. Farm packages (ranging from \$55 to \$1,550) are available from Farm Plan Computer System Inc., 1055 Sunnyvale-Saratoga Road, Sunnyvale, Calif. 94087.

#### • Radio Shack

1. Agricultural Software Source Book lists separate private programs (ranging from \$10 to \$4,000) and is available from Department AX10 One Tandy Centers, Fort Worth, Texas 76102.

2. AgriStar is a network software package (\$199.95) accessed by phone.

#### • IBM

1. The IBM System/23 Datamaster farm management accounting system (\$3,000 package program) is available as a package program (\$3,000) or under software and computer lease (\$400/month).

#### Computer information networks

- Access software by phone
- Constantly updated program
- Large number of programs
- Include: AG Net-University of Nebraska (Al Sterk), 105 Miller Hall, Lincoln, Neb. 68583; and Agri Data Resources Inc. (Warren Clark), 205 West Highland, Milwaukee, Wis. 53203.

#### Public domain software

- Advantages: Cheap (range \$25 to send disk), numerous
- Disadvantages: Varies in ease of use, little flexibility in what the program will do, no updating
- Best source for agricultural public domain software is an updated inventory of agriculture computer programs (contains 640 micro-computer programs) available from C.M. Hinton Publication Distributing Center, IFAS Building 664, University of Florida, Gainesville, Fla. 32611.

#### Spread sheets

- Versatile (can do records, inventory and possible investments versus returns)
- Easy to learn
- Names include Super Calc and Visi Calc (range from \$150 to \$250)

#### Complete registered cattle programs

- Health schedule and performance and more (\$2,000) available from Argos Computer, Allen Thodey, 790 West Show Avenue, Suite 360, Fresno, Calif. 93704.
- Bill Borrer's performance evaluation program includes 20 different reports such as weaning, yearling, etc. (\$695) and is available from Bill Borrer, 23829 Tehama Avenue, Gerber, Calif. 96035.

#### Newsletters

- Agri Comp, 1001 East Walnut Suite 201, Columbia, Mo. 65201, (314) 443-4316
- Agriculture Computing (\$48/year) Doane-Western Inc., 8900 Manchester Rd., St. Louis, Mo. 63144, (314) 968-1000
- Farm Computer News (\$40/year) Successful Farming Magazine, 1716 Locust St., Des Moines, Iowa 50336, (595) 284-3000
- Agricultural Microcomputing, Ridgetown College of Agriculture Technology, Ridgetown, Ont. N0P 2C0, (519) 674-5456
- Compu-Farm, Alberta Agriculture, Box 2000, Olds, Alta. T0M 1P0, (403) 556-8421
- Micro Letter, Extension Agricultural Economics, Waters Hall, Manhattan, Kan. 66506, (913) 532-5823
- Silicon Gulch Gazette, 345 Swett Rd., Woodside, Calif. 94062, (415) 851-8437
- Ag Bits, Computers in Ag Mailing List (free), Donna Steele, P.O. Box 2509, Bakersfield, Calif. 93303

AJ