



Tech Notes

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When two worlds collide

A few months ago, the Information Systems (IS) Department here at the American Angus Association activated online registrations, followed soon after by online submission of weaning weights. This new service has caused some confusion and potential problems for Angus Information Management Software (AIMS) users and the AIMS Department.

The problem occurs when AIMS users register cattle online but don't add the animals to AIMS. Then, when they get a registration-update file from us, it doesn't work.

The issue here is "point of origin." When you are using AIMS, the starting point of a new animal is when you add a new calf to a cow. That process adds a new record to your AIMS database with a tattoo for the calf, which is generally connected to the tattoo of a dam.

Eventually, if you intend to register the calf, you must enter the tattoo of the sire so AIMS can look up the registration number of that sire.

The key here is the requirement that every animal in AIMS must have a unique tattoo. Several AIMS users over the years have complained that they don't like that requirement. When I challenge them (and myself) to devise a better solution, no one has an answer.

Computerized databases require that at least one field is unique for every record (for every animal record, in this case), and we chose the tattoo.

Knowing that tattoos must be unique and that four characters for the normal tattoo aren't enough to make them unique, AIMS uses extensions added to the tattoos. For example, one resident cow might be tattoo "1234" and another animal (purchased at a sale, maybe) also has the physical tattoo "1234." In AIMS, the second animal might be known as "1234-C95."

Back to the point-of-origin issue. The normal method of registering calves with AIMS is to enter the data in AIMS, export a file to the Association, then receive a file with the new registration numbers. The return file also has the AIMS tattoo that the member used for the new calf, and AIMS can locate it by that number.

Two problems

What if you use the Internet to register the calf, then you try to update AIMS with the new calf using a file we sent you? Two problems result.

1. The calf tattoo may conflict with an existing animal's tattoo in your AIMS database. If you had entered the calf with AIMS, it would have alerted you. However, the system at the Association (we call it *RODEO*) doesn't know all the tattoos – and their extensions – in your system.
2. AIMS may not be able to connect this new calf with its sire and dam due to tattoo issues. *RODEO* knows the tattoo of the sire and dam, but it won't know if they have extensions in your AIMS. Yes, we could look up the sire and dam by registration number, but what if you

don't have those in your AIMS? You have a calf without a functioning pedigree.

Weighing the options

I would recommend to AIMS users to continue registering their cattle via AIMS, although the Internet system may be tempting.

1. It's neat. Call it a "geek factor," but it is cool to be able to enter data online and to receive registration numbers over the Internet.
2. There might be *slight* savings in time for the overall process since you don't have to export a file and send it to the Association.
3. There is extensive data validation with the online process so you know which calves will clear and which will not.

However, there's a flip side to all of these.

1. I'm as much of a geek as anyone, but it's also neat to be able to enter the calves on *my* AIMS. The software has the advantage of automatically entering the dam's information (by using the Calving tab with the dam) and easily selecting the sire. AIMS also has the ability to create animal names based on the sire's and dam's names, plus a one-button click to add the tattoo into the name.
2. Whether sending the export file or using direct online access, you still have to get online. (Note: I'm assuming everyone knows you can send registration and export files by e-mail. If you're still mailing disks, you're missing some of the benefits. See the Import/Export section of the Help file for information.)
3. AIMS has all of the same data validations, excluding artificial insemination (AI) certificate inventory checking.

In time

I don't want to give the impression that I'm opposed to the online registration and weight-submission processes. Remember, I'm a computer geek, so anything that takes advantage of technology is a good thing as long as it follows common sense. I fully support the process and want to merge the Internet's ability with AIMS. But keep in mind that some time savings will be lost if you want to do both systems.

We can (and plan to) reprogram AIMS to import new animals registered via the Internet. We would send you the equivalent of an additional animal file that you would import into AIMS. However, you then would need to interact with the system to ensure all calf tattoos are unique. You also would need to help AIMS link to the correct sire and dam. If you've ever added additional animals, you know this can be a tricky, tedious process.

Here's the bottom line: If you own AIMS but plan to submit records for registrations and weights via the Internet, you need to plan on double-entering the data for the short term. We plan to provide a crossover, but we have to weigh its implementation costs (in dollars and time) against the benefits. Right now, other projects have a higher priority considering that neither system (AIMS or the Internet) would benefit greatly from the change.

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