Tech Notes

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

Let your computer help with recordkeeping

Since the theme of this month's Angus Journal *is "recordkeeping," I thought I would take a more general approach to the whole area of electronic recordkeeping. Of course, I will focus most of this on the Angus Information Management Software (AIMS), but I think you will find that any type of software that works for you can accomplish some of these objectives.*

Have any of these scenarios happened to you?

Scenario 1

Someone drives up unannounced and wants to look at bulls. They ask to see the pedigrees and expected progeny differences (EPDs) of "those three bulls over there."

With AIMS, you can print out the pedigrees and EPDs of the bulls, as well as an up-to-date summary of their production records.

Without AIMS, you can show the buyer the one copy of the pedigree and EPD forms you got from the Association, but you'll have to mail him a copy later. In the meantime, you need to call the Association or get on the Internet to get the latest EPDs.

Scenario 2

You have an extensive artificial insemination (AI) program and would like to evaluate the success of each inseminator and sire you used over the last three years.

With AIMS, you can print a breeding report to see where the repeats are, and you can summarize it by inseminator.

Without AIMS, you can look over the breeding records from the barn; hopefully you can read the writing through the fly spots. And, by the way, it will go back only a few years, since the records from 1999 got destroyed in the flood.

Scenario 3

Your daughter wants to give a 4-H talk on what EPDs are and how the use of them has improved your average yearling weight over the last five years.

With AIMS, you can print the average yearling weight and EPDs for each of the last five calf crops.

Without AIMS, you spend a late night with a calculator and a stack of production reports — except for the report from three years ago. Remember the flood?

Scenario 4

You have 13 head of Angus cows, and your pedigrees are in a three-ring binder, the weaning summary is in a file folder, the yearling weights you did last week are on a scrap of paper from the scale, and who knows where the breeding records are?

With AIMS, you could enter all of this in one or two sittings at the computer and have it in one place. Once it's entered, you make a backup to a disk and store it in a safe place (above the water line).

Without AIMS, it's scattered everywhere, and that's for only 13 head.

The starting line

These all are scenarios that can happen to anyone, and I hope you see that AIMS can justify itself for the organizational aspect alone. I always have told people who are doing any type of recordkeeping that the initial data entry will take just as long as if it were done by hand, sometimes longer.

But there's no comparison to the computer when it comes to retrieving that data in some type of systematic, organized format to summarize data, to project trends or simply to document what happened.

To get started with electronic recordkeeping, you need a specific reason. Take any one of the previous situations and modify it to yours. Then crank up the computer and do only what you need to do to accomplish that one task. Concentrate on one purpose first, then try the other features.

I once heard a story about a 14-year-old girl who had just learned to drive and was out driving with her mother. Mom was talking about various things, and the daughter finally said, "Mom, quit talking — I'm concentrating!"

We take it for granted that once you've driven for a while, you do it without thinking. How many of you have driven to town on an errand, then couldn't remember what route you took? The point is, the first few tasks in AIMS will be the most difficult, but eventually you will get the hang of it and wonder why you didn't start earlier.

One of the biggest complaints I get about learning AIMS is "I don't have time." I understand that, but it boils down to an issue of priorities.

Are you spending time doing things that would be eliminated or reduced if you learned the program? Do you spend a lot of time completing forms to register calves or to submit weights? Do you spend a lot of time sorting through pedigrees to figure out a breeding scheme? Do you spend a lot of time adding up veterinary bills to see which cows are costing you too much money?

These all are tasks with which a computer can help because it can organize the data much faster and more accurately than a human can.

We're here to help

If you have ever thought to yourself, "Surely a computer could do this," you're probably right — it probably can do "this." But as I mentioned earlier, don't try to do everything the first day you get the computer and AIMS. Stick to one task, and add others later.

If you see yourself in any of the previous situations, use it to get yourself started with AIMS. And did I mention that the new version, 2.1, can do all of the above and more? We have packets of information about AIMS, and there is information on our Web site at *www.angus.org/aims*.

If all else fails and you have specific questions, just call the Association at (816) 383-5100 and ask for the AIMS Department. We'll do our best to explain what AIMS can do.

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Workshop announcement
There is a three-hour AIMS workshop preceding the National Angus Conference in North Platte, Neb., on Sept. 30. Check out the conference Web site (*www.angus.org/conference*) for details.