



From the Back Forty to the Files

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Some are computerized; some are kept in a shoe box; others on the bottom of a Skoal can.

The cattle business, particularly the purebred end of it, dictates a need for records . . . breeding, calving, health, correspondence, sales, accounting. The list is long. Most breeders find themselves in a familiar situation; they're keeping more records than they would like and fewer than they need.

Focusing on herd records, the actual what's-happening-to-the-cattle records, the organization is simple and straight forward. There is, however, a basic need for people gathering and organizing facts to believe

records are an investment. Accurate records enhance credibility; credibility enhances merchandizing ability. Thus, the incentive.

Certainly, size of an operation has tremendous bearing on the need for some of the record-keeping discussed in this article. For the breeder with 10 cows in his back yard, some of the record work will simply not apply. However, some will. And for the breeder with 300 cows, several employees, production sales, visitors and so forth, most would be considered essential.

Handiness Makes or Breaks

It's something we don't hear much about—the "packaging." The very fact that many

cattle records need to be used in the field necessitates their physical handiness. If they are only usable at a desk, records immediately become less valuable.

For instance, several years ago we had a computerized printout for calving sequence. The computer sheets measured 15 inches wide by 11 inches deep. The cows and heifers for any upcoming calving season took from two to three pages. The information was easy to read at the office; it was orderly, accurate; it listed the females by tag number in order of due date, with the service date, service sire, type of service and estimated date of calving. But the report was useless when it left the office

because it didn't fit on the dashboard of a pickup or in a coat pocket; it tore easily; it flapped in the wind; turning from page to page was a major ordeal.

Then we condensed the information to one regular-size sheet of typing paper. You could fold it, keep it in your truck. It measured 8½x11 inches. These sheets lasted about a week, after which no one could find his copy.

Finally, we put fewer facts on 3x4-inch cards that were glued to the back pages of a pocket herd book. Because we have several pastures of springing cows and heifers, we made one card for each pasture and listed cows in order of due date, with an abbreviation for service sire. This packaging made the records usable.

Who Keeps What?

There are those who gather the facts; there are those who organize them. At Garney Cattle Co., we have a general manager, cow herd manager and secretary, all involved in keeping records. Communication is needed to get the job done.

It is a basic principle that accuracy of herd records hinges upon people in the pasture. They are the authority on what's happening. So both the general manager and the cow herd manager carry herd books in their shirt pockets or on the dashboard of the pickup at all times. This is a small spiral notebook in which they record observations and events of the day. It includes breeding, calving, health problems and those details which need attention, like a fence corner that needs fixing or a mineral feeder that needs to be filled.

These little notebooks have become almost sacred at our ranch. They are the best source for accurate information.

It is the secretary's duty to study the day's notes and sort any information that needs to be posted, filed or reworked.

Daily information is recorded as follows:

Calving. We note the date, cow tag, calf tag, sex, leg measurements and heart girth circumference (this measurement translates into birth weight). At this time, any special remarks are recorded, like retained placenta, delayed nursing, chilled calf, pulled calf, abnormal presentation, etc.

Back at the office, a calf tag is made and sire-coded. A running accounting of newborn calves is maintained, including all information gathered in the field plus sire information (after correspondence to breeding information is verified), and birth weight is calculated. Calf tags are assigned in sequence. We use the last digit of the year as the first digit of the tag number. The 100th calf born in 1980, then, would be 0100. This number becomes both the calf's herd number and tattoo number.

Breeding. Facts to be concerned about are date of service, service sire, cow tag number, type of service, technician (if service is artificial). Again, miscellaneous notes are helpful as a reference. Some of these would include enlarged cervix, possible infection, infusion, pipette not passed

NAME										REG. NO.		TATTOO		HERD NO.				
GARNEY ANNIE 3080										8054218		3080		3080				
SIRE										REG. NO.		CALVED		SEX				
BIFPLES EMULOUS 795										6161178		4/14/73		Cow				
DAM										REG. NO.								
ANNIE H14 (Tag #1010)										6442919								
Birth Wt.	Wean Date	Wean Wt.	205 Adj.	Index	Grade	Date Weighed	Wt.	365 Adj.	Index	Grade								
68	11/1/73	455	475	100		5/10/74	710	690	101									
Bongs																		
10/03/73																		
Date	Sex	Sire	Tattoo	Herd No.	B. Wt.	Wean Date	Wt.	205 Adj.	Index	Gr.	Test Date	On Wt.	Fin. Wt.	ADG	365 Adj.	Index	Gr.	W/DA
2/17	C	178	5010	5010	62	12/3	550	470	105						562	98		
4/20	C	4055	6082	6082	75	10/7	465	599	116	(Sold '76	Production	Sale	\$1,850)					
3/05	C	3093	7030	7030	65	10/2	490	515	108						655	100		
3/15	B	3093	8044	8044	78	10/25	660	611	103		12/5	805	1350	3.9	1221	112		3.33
5/04	C	7044	9083	9083	74	10/16	465	560	106	(Sold privately	3/10/80	\$2,250)						
3/13	B	3093	0072	0072	68	10/20	645	630	108									

Production Card

all the way through the cervix, if the cow seemed too hot or too cold to the inseminator. It is a good routine to check previous notes if a cow recycles.

Health. Symptoms and treatments are recorded for several reasons. Say, for instance, two baby calves are to be treated for scours at the beginning of a calving season. We may wish to use different drugs on these two calves to test the effectiveness of

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each. We will need to know which calf received what. And as the calving season progresses, treatment for scours will vary depending upon whether the calf is a new case or a retreatment.

Second, if treatment of a problem is turned over to a veterinarian, the veterinarian will want to know the history of symptoms and of treatment. Particularly if you are dealing with long-acting or interacting drugs, this information could be vital.

The rest. We also note the watering eye to recheck, the female that cycles when no service is carried out (important in estrous synchronization) or a neighbor's bull out in one of our pastures.

Through the Chute

When cattle are worked through the chute, we keep a worksheet handy to note all cattle worked on that date, vaccinations received, work done, etc. The worksheet would read something like this: 5-1-80, north barn pasture; pregnancy check cows (Joe); weigh cows; 5 cc. vitamin A, D; Rabon tags; lept 5-way. Then a list of the cows worked would follow.

Back in the office, the list is reworked, putting cows in numerical order. The original worksheet is placed in a file called "field records." The reworked list would be crossfiled under vaccinations, pregnancy check and cow weights.

We like to keep a record of brand names of vaccines used simply because we think there is some variation in quality and we know there is variation in cost. Our records indicate from time to time a preference for some brands.

AHIR records are maintained at Garney Cattle Co., and we feel AHIR represents the best route to complete performance record-keeping. Turn-around time from submission to receipt is short; the personnel handling the records are knowledgeable and helpful; the computer provides the accuracy we want.

The American Angus Assn. provides excellent step-by-step material on AHIR services, so this article will not go into detail regarding these records.

Other Records

In addition to AHIR, we keep a visible card file on the cow herd. Each female of breeding age has two cards in the file. One card is for production; the other is for breeding information.

The production card is very similar to the produce of dam summary we receive from AHIR. We add the female's individual performance record (birth weight, actual and adjusted weaning weight, actual and adjusted yearling weight), the tag number of her dam and date of calthood vaccination for brucellosis. Identification and performance information on progeny are set up very much like AHIR records. We personalize them further by adding status of the progeny. Any progeny sold will be noted as such, with date of sale and sale price. Information on any progeny that die will list a reason for death. Any progeny sold commercially or castrated will be so noted.

LOC.	TO	BULL	T Y P E	DATE	PASTURE		P R E G.	DUE DATE	LOC.	FR.	TO	BULL	T Y P E	DATE	PASTURE		P R E G.	DUE DATE
					IN	OUT									IN	OUT		
NEP		178	A-KH	5/15	(FCB)		S	2/22/75	SSP			3427	A-KH	5/17	(JK)		S	2/23/81
NWP		3093	X-P-M			6/08	7/15		BHP			8072	X-P-M			6/03	7/12	
NEP		178	A-KH	6/20									A-P-H					
NWP		4055	X-P-M			7/02	8/01						A-P-H					
NWP		4055	X-P-M	7/12				S	4/20/76				A-P-H					
NBP		3093	A-KH	5/29				S	3/08/77				A-P-H					
NBP		3093	X-P-M			6/29	8/04						A-P-H					
BGP		3093	A-KH	5/31	(FCB)			S	3/10/78				A-P-H					
BHP		153	X-P-M			7/02	7/28						A-P-H					
BHP		3093	A-KH	5/19	(FCP)		infused						A-P-H					
NWP		3093	A-KH	6/09	(FCB)		late						A-P-H					
NWP		7044	X-P-M			7/11	8/03						A-P-H					
NWP		7044	X-P-M	7/25				S	5/04/79				A-P-H					
TCP		3093	X-K-H	6/06				S	3/16/80				A-P-H					
TCP		8077	X-P-M			6/18	7/20						A-P-H					
HERD NO.				TATTOO		SEX		BIRTHDATE										
3080				3080		Cow		4/14/73										

Breeding Card

As cows are removed from the herd, cards are pulled and placed in a dead file. Again, we would note any sales with appropriate notes.

As heifers enter a breeding season, their cards are added to the card file.

The other card maintained in the visible file is the breeding card. This lists all service dates, service sires, type of insemination, inseminator (if the service was artificial) and all pasture exposures. Also, notes are made if a female was infused after artificial service or injected for synchronization purposes. Upon pregnancy check, the date to which she is examined safe is recorded, with estimated due date entered.

Starting Over

When a female calves, the correspondence between breeding date and calving date is rechecked. If she has calved in accordance with her safe date, a line is drawn under all current breeding notations to show that the procedure is starting over.

In addition to AHIR, we keep a visible card file on the cow herd. Each female of breeding age has two cards in the file. One card is for production; the other is for breeding information.

Cow production cards are seemingly a duplication of AHIR for the most part, with the exception of personalizing features. For the breeder who needs to choose between the two systems, AHIR is the likely choice, because AHIR does performance computation that otherwise would have to be done by hand.

The visible card file is a luxury item. Though manually maintained, the records earn their keep because they are highly utilized at our ranch. By looking at the side-

by-side setup of production and breeding history, it is a totally complete study of the female's life story in the herd. Our customers like the idea that we expose the life history of cows—good or bad, the whole story is there.

Sire summaries are provided by AHIR. Without their help, we would either have a gap in our sire records or else we would need to do a good deal more work to organize this information.

Location Status

Another item we also maintain is a location listing. It simply lists in numerical order all cows (with calf number), heifers, bulls, steers and their respective locations on the ranch.

Naturally, to do this, we must have some way of identifying locations. At Garney Cattle Co. we have 16 possible pasture or corral locations, and we have them named by some geographical identity—like the east lake pasture, horse barn pasture, north prairie pasture. Abbreviations are used to code.

Keeping the location report current is accomplished by records kept by the cow herd manager. We had a simple form printed to accommodate information needed—date, location moved from and to, list of cattle moved. This information is used to keep the report current.

In larger operations, inventory is needed on a regular basis, and this system helps. But it has several purposes other than counting noses.

It becomes a simple task to make worksheets from the office to speed along the work of the cow herd manager. When the cows in a certain location are to be pregnancy checked, it is helpful to make a worksheet showing only cows in that pasture and then flip through the card file to get the respective breeding date(s). Later we might wish to make a sort-sheet for the cow herd manager, showing cows expected to calve in the first 30 days of calving season

so he can move them to a calving pasture.

Other Uses

Around production sale time, the location sheet is used by several of us involved with helping visitors locate dam, grandams and sisters of herd bull prospects.

Another case in which pasture location comes in handy for inventory is during vaccination time. If we are going to vaccinate a group of young calves for blackleg during hot weather, we'll want to take the least volume of vaccine for the number of calves in that area.

Another way in which the report is of help is for a cow that calves unexpectedly. By checking the pasture report for the time period she would have been served, we can find out if a bull was in an adjoining pasture. Although we would blood type the calf to be certain, the location report may provide the clue to the sire.

During breeding season, we use the pasture location report to make a "scoreboard" for each breeding pasture. These sheets show only cows in that pasture, with three columns after the tag number for service notations. Thus, there would be a sheet for yearlings that are synchronized, first-calf heifers that may need additional care, top end of mature cows sorted into a certain area and so forth. These breeding sheets make us constantly aware of the portion of each group that has been served, the number of repeat services necessary, and it provides a quick awareness of a potential semen quality problem. If we are using four bulls artificially and the semen quality of one of them is sub-par, he probably will be appearing in the "second service" column with some consistency.

People Records

For small breeders selling locally, memory may suffice regarding customer information. In large herds, however, there is little chance that customer information can be maintained without extra effort.

In our office, the system is a card file on breeders who have made purchases of cattle or semen, inquired directly via letter or telephone, visited the ranch or are prospective customers because of some other reason. There are approximately 1,000 cards in the file. They are color-coded according to category as listed above. At times we may wish to send a letter to all customers, for instance, and it will be necessary to make a mailing list containing just those breeders who have made purchases. The list is compiled by pulling the card color for sales.

Each card in the file contains breeder name, ranch name, address and telephone number. The sales card contains the date of each purchase, cattle or semen purchased (cattle listed by herd number) and sale price. Further information is added any time the customer makes further inquiries or purchases or visits the ranch, and we would note any time we visit his operation.

Because we have had seven production sales and there are that many duplications

SIMPSON, JOHN
Rolling Hills Angus Ranch
Route #3
Nevada, Missouri 64772
(417) 667-6606

10/15/75 -- Sale Catalog Request
11/24/75 -- Purchased Heifer 5101 / \$925
11/01/76 -- Purchased 3 certificates / Bull 3093
9/28/77 -- Ranch visitor
11/21/77 -- Purchased Heifer 7109 / \$1150
1/29/78 -- Purchased 4 Certificates / "Extender"
7/12/78 -- Frank visited Rolling Hills Ranch
11/20/78 -- Purchased Heifer 8043/ \$3,750 and Bull 8007/
\$4,000
12/10/79 -- Called regarding show steer prospect for his
son. Referred him to Jack Stoner.
6/30/80 -- Called regarding photo of 3093. Photo mailed
7/01/80

Sales Card

of lot numbers, we record all sale cattle by herd number. When a customer calls us to report on cattle he has purchased from us through a production sale, it is sometimes helpful to pull his sales card to refer to the herd number(s) purchased. Herd numbers are fairly permanent in our minds; lot numbers are temporary.

Inquiry cards reflect date as well as nature of inquiry. If the inquirer requests that information or material be sent to him, such as pedigrees or test summaries, we note that this material was forwarded.

Preprinted visitor cards are completed by visitors. This is our way of registering guests and learning something about their operations.

Prospective customer cards list the date entered in the file and the reason the card is being entered. Perhaps he's a neighbor with commercial cows and has never visited our ranch; or maybe he's an officer of the National Cattleman's Assn.

Semen Sales Records

If semen and A.I. service certificates are going to be part of the program, there will be some space in the file required for these transactions.

As seller, we record purchaser, date of purchase, bull desired, preference for straws or amps, name to which certificates should be assigned, nearest bus depot, telephone number to call upon arrival and mailing address. In exchange for that infor-

mation, we make an effort to provide all information regarding details of pricing, such as whether semen and certificates are sold separately or as a package, whether the customer is expected to pay shipping. And we try to be certain that he understands where the semen shipment will originate and the shipping lab's fees involved.

The sale is then recorded on an invoice restating transaction details. A copy is mailed to the purchaser, verifying that the order has been turned in to the shipping lab. If the lab has verified the shipment will go out that day, it is good to record that on the invoice. Hopefully, the shipment will arrive before the invoice; but in case it does not, at least the customer will know when to expect it.

We keep semen sales cross-filed, with the sales invoice copy filed in the buyer's sales folder, the sales notation on the sales card in the people file and also a running tally for each bull. This listing shows all sales by date, listing the customer, number of units shipped, number of certificates purchased, date certificates were mailed to customer and date payment was received.

The value of records lies in their accuracy and usefulness. Each breeder must tailor-make his records to fit his operation. Then the success of his system is dependent upon gathering facts and organizing those facts into a concise and usable form.

The computer; the shoe box; the Skoal can. They all have their place. 