



Angus Stakes

► by *Shauna Rose Hermel*, editor

National look at herd health, management

Every 10 years or so, USDA's National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) conducts an in-depth study within the beef industry to gain insight into the health and management of the U.S. beef cow herd. By in-depth, we're talking personal on-farm interviews to drill deep into herds' health and management practices.

Industry benchmarks

The studies give us a benchmark to the management practices cattlemen across the country are and aren't adopting, the problems they are having and their areas of focus. For example, in the 2007-2008 study, 78.8% of

producers in the West and 60.8% of producers in

the Central region calved in the spring. Most producers (54.8%) in the Southeast calved year-round. It will be interesting to see if there are any significant changes to calving time this year.

Another example, the study indicated that in the first six months of 2008, 3.2% of calves born alive died before weaning — and that was similar for herds of all sizes. Calves born dead accounted for 44.5% of losses prior to weaning during the first six months of 2008, while 28% died 24 hours to three weeks after birth and 14% died after 3 weeks of age.

HERD HEALTH

The information gleaned is helpful on a number of levels. Maybe one of the most important is that big-picture view: On a national scale, are death rates increasing or decreasing? Are losses occurring at a different time than in the past, and, if so, does that

signify a new disease threat?

If producers are changing

calving times, what does that mean in terms of the advice needed from extension, nutritionists, veterinarians, animal health companies, etc.?

Hitting closer to home: If there are changes to calving season, how does that affect your bull or female sales? Should you change your calving date? Should you change your sale date? It can influence what month we publish stories on calving management.

There's a wealth of information available online (<http://bit.ly/2n9Clkf>) from the 2007-2008 study. In addition to the management

benchmarks, that study focused on microbial use/resistance and the incidence of bovine viral diarrhea among beef cow herds.

Up this year

NAHMS will conduct another beef cow-calf study this fall. As a first step, it has already conducted a needs assessment to determine which management areas deserve greater focus and to develop objectives for the project.

In the needs assessment, producers were asked to rank their top five issues from among a list. Not surprisingly, calf health and cow health were indicated by both number of mentions and rank as being the areas of greatest priority. Nutrition/feed management was in the top five more often, but had a lower average ranking than animal welfare. The same was true for environmental stewardship/sustainability (mentioned more times, but lower average ranking) compared to biosecurity/disease prevention.

These responses will be used this summer to set the objectives of the study and prepare the survey, which will be conducted later this fall. If you have a chance to provide input into the survey, I hope you will grasp the opportunity. While a time commitment and rather personal, it is a great service to the industry and it has far-reaching impact.

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