



Cattle Producer's Handbook

Introduction Section

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INTRODUCTION

Cattle Producer's Handbook

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The *Cattle Producer's Handbook* is a collection of fact sheets that are resources for any size beef cattle operation. Material has been developed by the Western Beef Resource Committee, which consists of Cooperative Extension System animal scientists, veterinarians, and other specialists from Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

The committee set the following objectives:

1. To develop or collect as complete a set of informative material as can be found that has a bearing on beef production systems. The information in the Handbook is in brief, easy-to-read fact sheets that deal with specific subjects. They are written by specialists whom the committee considered the best authorities in a particular subject area.
3. To develop support material for the *Cattle Producer's Handbook* in the form of other media such as CDs, DVDs, Internet content, etc.

Regardless of where cattle producers are or how they operate, producers must manage within the confines of the biological facts of beef production. The following are facts that all cattle producers know and take for granted. Producers sometimes expect Mother Nature to bend her rules to fit their management plan. Facts that cannot be changed are:

1. An egg and a sperm must come together in the proper circumstances to make a new calf.
2. The length of pregnancy in beef cattle is approximately 282 days.
3. The normal cow takes approximately 40 days after calving to return to estrous and be prepared to start a new pregnancy.
4. The estrus cycle is approximately 21 days.
5. Puberty is a function of age and size.
6. Certain nutrients are required for growth and production.
7. Wide variation occurs in growth rate and in limits to that growth rate.

8. In most cases, the biological cycle of the cow must be managed within the climate and seasonal limitations of one locality.
9. Disease problems are a constant threat.
10. Cows and bulls pass on to their offspring both desirable and undesirable traits.

Every cattle producer, facing the formidable task of managing a beef herd to a profitable level, must take these biological facts into consideration. This must be done within the abilities, limits, philosophical knowledge, physical facilities, environment, finances, and labor the cattle producer has.

Important Questions to Ask

Most cattle producers would respond, "yes," if asked the question, "Would you like to be better at what you do or what you are tomorrow, next week, and next year?" Would you give a "yes" answer?

The major problem that most cattle producers face in getting to where they want to be or where they want to go with their operation is that these objectives have not been answered clearly enough. Before cattle producers can really get on the road to where they want to go, producers need to ask themselves these searching questions and give honest answers.

Why are you in cattle ranching? Is it to use capital? Is it to become employed as a laborer? Is it to use your managerial skills? Is it to employ your family? Is it because you want to be an independent business person? Is it because you enjoy living in the country? Is it because you enjoy working with animals? Is it because you want to be identified with a romantic period in history?

You may have answered, "yes," to all of these questions and justifiably so. They are all legitimate reasons for being in the cattle business. The priority that producers place upon these reasons may have a bearing upon the return received from each of these reasons. This also will have an impact on the management philosophy that develops in the beef production enterprise.