



Cattle Producer's Handbook

Introduction Section

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Herd Data: The Clues to Cow Efficiency

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Integrated Resource Management (IRM) is a systems approach to problem solving and management in a cow-calf operation. An important part of being able to manage effectively is knowing the status of the herd and having accurate records of management activities. This information is called “base data.”

Base data are necessary for measuring progress toward management objectives. In IRM, the primary base data to measure are the four key indicators: growth, open cows, length of calving season, and calf death loss.

Annual Herd Summary

A cow herd should be managed by the objectives according to the stage in the biological cycle and season. Cow herd performance can easily be measured and evaluated annually based upon the four (4) indicators:

1. Growth in pounds for calves or yearlings.
2. Open cows or late calving cows—number in herd.
3. Length of the calving season in days.
4. Death loss in number and kind of cattle.

An annual summary of the **GOLD** (4) key indicators will clearly determine the efficiency or inefficiency of the cow herd.

The Value of Good Records

Records can be cumbersome and time consuming. It is not uncommon for a producer or ranch manager to become overwhelmed with information. Records too few or too many may become a hazard to management and improved herd efficiency. Most ranchers are reluctant to keep records. However, they often become excited when they collect meaningful base data.

The IRM (red) pocket field book has been developed to help cattle producers gather, record, and summarize the base data on their herds. Sections in the book relate

to specific activities or events that take place throughout the year. When summarized, the base data from each of these sections can be used to develop a herd management flow chart or management picture (see next page).

The IRM pocket field book is designed for use beginning with the calving season and ending with weaning the calves and shaping up the cow herd. It provides direction to the selection and recording of pertinent herd data, which can enhance herd management for both reproductive efficiency and profitability. In addition to the herd data sections, the field book also contains a daily calendar and an address section making it one of the most useful and important tools that a cattle producer has.

The herd management flow chart helps identify key opportunities for improving herd performance, tracks the management changes that are made, and shows the impact of these changes as measured by the four key indicators. Management activities and the sections of the pocket field book related to each of those activities are described below.

Calving Season

Calf Information—The calf information record section is completed throughout the calving season and provides space for individual records on each calf. The records include cow identification and age, sire, calf identification, date of birth, birth weight, calving ease score, sex death code (if needed), weaning date, and weaning weight.

Calving Activity—This is one of the most valuable sections of the book because it summarizes the calving season. The number of births occurring on each day of the calving season is recorded according to the age of the cow. The calving season is divided into 21-day periods, thus showing the distribution of births throughout the calving season. This distribution of births is as important