Cattle Chat: Record keeping priorities

K-State beef cattle experts offer up the most important records to keep on the herd

MANHATTAN, Kan. — Deciding what to keep or get rid of can be a challenge when sorting out clothes in a closet or clearing out relics from childhood because often there is an emotional factor influencing the decision.

Emotional decision-making can also influence the beef cattle herd where oftentimes there is that one favorite cow that a producer may find hard to sell. In such cases, the experts at the Kansas State University Beef Cattle Institute agree that analyzing farm records can help inform herd decisions.

Speaking on a recent Cattle Chat podcast, the experts discussed key records to help in the keep-versus-cull decision.

“The differences in marketing strategies and the genetic investment will dictate how the level of performance plays in the keep or cull decision,” said Brad White, veterinarian.

Four key records include feed cost, body condition score, the number of pounds per calf weaned per exposed female and the pregnancy status of the cows.

**Feed cost:** “Feed is typically the largest expense in any operation, and it can have a significant impact on profit,” said Dustin Pendell, agricultural economist.

**Body condition score:** “It is important to write down the body condition scores of the whole herd and then adjust accordingly if there are some in the herd that are too thin,” said Bob Larson, veterinarian.

**Pounds of calf weaned per exposed female:** “The number of pounds of calf weaned per female exposed encompasses nutrition, genetics and reproduction, which can make it a hard record to evaluate because it isn’t one factor,” said Phillip Lancaster, nutritionist. Veterinarian Brian Lubbers agreed and added: “Measuring the weaning weight can tell you a lot about the herd.”
Pregnancy status: “Knowing her pregnancy status will help with the keep or cull decision. There is a cost to bring new animals into the herd and the longer a cow stays in the herd, the investment is extended over a greater number of years,” White said.

Counter to White’s point, however, was Larson’s belief that all cows that don’t wean a calf should be culled regardless of genetics or other factors.

“If she is open, she has to go,” Larson said.

One point that the experts were in complete agreement on was the value in having whole herd records.

“Keeping and evaluating records over time helps producers make decisions that will not only benefit their bottom line, but the success of the herd overall,” White said.

To hear more of this discussion, listen to the Cattle Chat podcast online.

-30-

FOR PRINT PUBLICATIONS: Links used in this story
BCI Cattle Chat podcast, https://ksubci.org/2021/12/03/record-analysis-culling-pregnant-cows-different-profit-cow-calf-operations-withdrawals/

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