

A Cattleman's Fairy Tale

Cattle breeders across the country can write a happily ever after for their operation when they engage in proper recordkeeping habits.

by Megan Silveira, assistant editor

When you combine a knight properly donned in shining armor, a fire-breathing dragon, a princess locked away in some dark and dreary tower, and an ending capable of being happy until the end of time, what do you get?

Since the beginning of time, people have been enamored with fairy tales. One might think these stories are too good to be true, but for the average cattle producer, there is a way to achieve happily ever after.

Terrell Miller, owner of CattleMax herd management software, says ranchers can write their own fairy tales by learning to keep the best of herd records.

"It's sort of like the story of Goldilocks and the three bears," he says. "Some records are too much, some aren't enough, and some are just right."

Adding to the plot

Miller describes recordkeeping as a process rather than an event,

and says the process holds many purposes — especially for a breeder of registered cattle.

First, Miller says breeders need information to meet the requirements of the American Angus Association when it comes time to register calves. From animal

inventory to calving records and weights throughout the production cycle, Miller says there are many numbers and records the Association needs from breeders.

"This is information that ultimately better helps ranchers register their cattle

in a more timely manner," he adds. Miller says this information allows the Association to not only create accurate registration papers but also better develop expected progeny differences (EPDs).

By keeping records year-round, Brad Wright, owner of Ranch Hand Analytics, says ranchers in turn are able to provide the Association with more accurate data. Accurate data at the Association leads to more accurate EPDs, leading to a

more efficient and productive beef industry, he adds.

"It is easier to stay current than it is to get current," Wright says. "Being prompt and consistent with data entry will decrease errors."

Second, Miller says records are often needed when making sales. Customers and potential buyers request certain information before making a purchase, an essential part of ranchers turning a profit. Miller says often this information is typically very similar to the records required by the Association.

Wright says registered breeders hold the responsibility of being performance-based, and keeping records allows them to meet the expectations and needs of their buyers.

"Every seedstock breeder should be collecting data," he adds. "We're selling our products to commercial cattlemen, so we have to identify those desirable genetics with a high degree of confidence for our customers."

Third, Miller says ranchers need records for their own use. This information is used by no one other than the rancher, but is necessary to the upkeep of the operation, Miller says.

This is the widest set of data, and Miller says it can range from records

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about purchases and sales of cattle to semen inventory. This last reason for data collection is crucial to decisions ranchers make about culling and keeping females and other economic-based decisions.

Wright stresses the importance of keeping records to make those tough culling decisions. He says eliminating livestock incapable of improving a herd's genetics will help progress the entire industry.

"We can make a lot of genetic progress by culling the lower-performing females," Wright says. "By culling these animals, the whole population can move forward."

Developing the characters

While the amount of information breeders have to record can be overwhelming, Miller has a few tips to make recordkeeping easier for the average cattle breeder. Both Miller and Wright suggest ranchers employ the use of an online database to record their data, rather than just inputting information onto a spreadsheet or notebook.

"A registered breeder has so much information they need to keep. You'll get to spreadsheets with more than 30 columns and multiple tabs. At that point, you're creating spreadsheet spaghetti," Miller jokes.

Online databases allow for ranchers to engage in what Miller refers to as "real-time recording." With the use of modern technology and internet connectivity, he said this option allows for all ranch personnel to be connected instantaneously and have access to



the same data.

"With real-time recordkeeping, the data is available to anyone on the ranch with the log-in capabilities," he says. "Everyone has access to the same information so they can make their own decisions."

This method eliminates the use of tattered old feed tags as scratch paper or several varying copies of worn herd books as well as the problems that come with this recordkeeping strategy, Miller adds.

"I think it's important for registered breeders to have some type of electronic records," Miller says. "Making recordkeeping easier on themselves is imperative for them to succeed and enjoy their business."

Wright says there are several

different database options available, meaning ranchers can find the program that best fits their operation. This option for recordkeeping is something Wright strongly believes all modern ranchers should invest in.

"Online databases are crucial to this business," he adds.

To further ease the recordkeeping process, Wright suggests ranchers emphasize consistency. He encourages cattle breeders to map out a calendar highlighting the key dates when information will need to be collected and recorded. From timing to organization, consistency in all aspects of a breeder's records will only lead them closer to success, Wright says.

Happily ever after can happen on any ranch. With the use of accurate, detailed and consistent records, every cattle breeder can make their fairy tale a reality. **AJ**

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