



Production records essential for risk management decisions

By James Sedman and John Hewlett

Most agricultural producers know they need proper record-keeping.

Accurate, up-to-date records and financial statements can help establish profitability and assist with management decisions when needed. Well-kept records ease the burden of tax planning and preparation. Risk-management decisions are made most effectively when accurate production and financial records are readily available. Finally, keeping accurate, up-to-date records is especially important for producers who utilize crop and livestock insurance products under the federal crop insurance programs.

In the case of “actual production history” or revenue-based crop insurance policies, production records help establish the production history used in calculating indemnity payments.

Organizing a Production Record System

Basic forms for production records are available from several sources, including a local crop insurance agent. Tailoring a record-keeping system for an individual operation is fairly simple. Using a personal computer, pocket personal computer, or even a notebook, forms can be set up to keep accurate production records.

Producers should first identify all areas farmed or utilized from maps or photographs. Then list and categorize each unit/field by practice (i.e. irrigated, non-irrigated, organic). Each crop grown or number of livestock grazed should be recorded by unit/field for each production year. Important dates should be recorded, such as planting, spraying, tillage operations, irrigations, turn-in dates, etc. Listing dates for any yield-altering events, such as hail, windstorms, or floods, is also critical.



Once records are in place for each unit, a system can be built upon for harvest and sale records. Recording the total harvested production for each unit is essential, especially for insurance purposes. Noting whether harvested production is weighed on the farm or commercially, or is estimated, is also

important. If production goes to storage, inventory records for each bin and which unit the production came from must be recorded.

Grain and hay producers should calculate moisture levels and shrinkage whenever possible to provide the most accurate description of the harvest. Livestock feeding operators must be sure to record quantities and dates of production fed to livestock. Keeping accurate harvest, feeding, and storage records makes filing crop insurance reports much easier and more accurate.

Adding Variable, Fixed-Cost Records Easy Step

With sound production records for yields and harvests established, adding variable and fixed cost records to the system is an easy next step. This provides an accurate, yearly picture of total costs and returns. Producers can plan more effectively from year to year with their crop insurance agents for the

most effective insurance coverage for their operation.

Several options exist to modernize or set up a recordkeeping system. A crop insurance agent can supply a basic production record management handbook from the Risk Management Agency. An online version, along with other risk management information, is available in the Western Risk Management Library (<http://agecon.uwyo.edu/riskmgt>). Many commercial options are available for both production and financial records. The Alberta Government's Agricultural Software Directory provides a good list of options at [www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$department/dept-docs.nsf/all/econ4118](http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/dept-docs.nsf/all/econ4118).

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Early calf weaning as drought management strategy has benefits

By Kellie Chichester

Early weaning can be used as an alternative management strategy during years of drought when forages are already stressed.

Studies suggest early weaning reduces overall forage intake, reducing or delaying the need to relocate cattle to new pastures. This also reduces the need to supplement with purchased feed or stockpiled hay. Inadequate nutrition during drought conditions can result in lower milk production, reduced reproductive performance, and potential negative impact on suckling calf growth.

While calf removal and the associated elimination of the nutrient requirements of lactation would be expected to improve body condition score (BCS), impacts on reproductive efficiency are more variable. They are dependent on actual time of weaning

flow and production budgets and available facilities.

Are you able to background the cattle yourself, or are you going to sell the calves at lighter weights? More labor and facilities are required to background and develop early weaned calves; however, only minimal facilities are necessary for early weaning.

The benefits of early weaning, increased productivity for the dam, and the high efficiency of a young calf have been studied by many researchers. Weaning calves as early as 6 weeks of age has been evaluated, but early weaning of calves at 120 to 180 days of age has shown that those calves have an increased body weight gain during backgrounding periods and a greater feed efficiency. During the finishing period, those weaned early continued to be more efficient than traditionally weaned calves. This early removal does not appear to have an impact on carcass performance. In most studies, a larger number of early weaned calves graded Choice or greater than the calves traditionally weaned.

Traditional weaning occurs at 205 days and at this time all calves are removed from the dam and either sold to a commercial feeder or retained and fed until calves reach a determined end point. The older calves have shown to have a reduced, or poorer feed efficiency than those weaned early.

Early weaning isn't only a management tool for calves, but cows as well. In extreme situations, early weaning prior to breeding can dramatically improve breeding success in thin cows by reducing their lactation requirements prior to breeding. Fall calving cows that wean



calves before the traditional time consume less total digestible nutrients than cows still nursing calves. Additionally, early weaned cows were more efficient in converting pounds of total digestible nutrients into pounds of gain.

Removal of the calf, especially for young or thin cows, allows them time to add body weight and condition if needed prior to breeding season thus leading to increased conception rates in many cases. In arid climates when grasses begin to dry up in early summer months and quality decreases, removal of the calf allows for more feed to sustain cows, prolonging the time until or suspending the need to supplement prior to winter.

This may not be a management alternative for everyone. Early weaning considerations should be considered as it applies to the operation. This may not be a viable option for seedstock producers needing to keep accurate weaning weights or maternal values of the dam for breeding expected progeny differences. All things considered, the decision should be made to produce the greatest economic benefit to the operation.

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relative to birth, on BCS at time of weaning, pre-parturition nutrition and management, and subsequent feed and forage availability.

Early weaning is not a one-size-fits-all approach to management. Producers considering early weaning need to evaluate their cash