

News Column

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As the New Year has rolled out

I'm not really one that makes New Year's resolutions, or at least I think that. But in reality, I always say I am going to get better at something each year. I will stop there, and not elaborate on whether it always happens, or not.

Sandy Johnson our NW area extension livestock specialist resolution is to clean-up her office. Yes for those of you that have seen my office that would also be a great resolution for me as well. But anyways she came across an article written by Chris Ringwall of NDSU on cow herd record keeping pitfalls based on his experiences. So Sandy passed along that article thinking the start of a new year is a great opportunity to resolve doing better cow herd record keeping.

Keeping an accurate cow inventory doesn't seem like it should be a problem but it is at the top of Chris's list and that matches with my own experience. It could be that deaths or sales don't happen that often and it isn't in our daily routine of chores, making it harder to develop the habit. If an accurate, timely inventory is a challenge, resolve to renew your efforts in 2017. If those records aren't being kept, ask why and what would make it easier to get them recorded in your operation? If a disease process hits your herd, dates and details will help resolve the issue.

With the widespread use of smartphones, snapping a picture might be one approach that could be used to help with inventory changes. If the tag or other identification is visible it is an excellent record and the photo comes with its own time stamp. Including the reason or cause of culling or death could be texted or emailed with the photo to the record keeper. For the less tech savvy person, the same information could be recorded on a calendar, in a note book or any other handy way that makes it easy to do. Find a method that works for your operation and has some method of redundancy to minimize the loss of all data in case of phone or notebook calamities. Record keeping must become a habit and represent the culture of the operation.

It's highly unlikely that anyone forgets to turn out the bulls for the breeding season, however, recording the specific date that event occurs may get overlooked. When it comes to looking at reproduction data and troubleshooting any problems, an approximate date may distort the information and lead you astray. Same goes for the date bulls are pulled. Get it recorded in a place you can reference later.

If records are handwritten and are not legible, it is like not having them at all. Perhaps entry space needs to be larger for winter notations to account for writing in gloves? I've seen attempts to squeeze some note in by an entry but an hour later no one knows what it says. It's OK to

make a note with the appropriate ID at the end or backside of the record sheet. Most smart phones can also record audio, so perhaps a recorded note might fit some operations.

Lack of unique cow identification is another pitfall on the list. It could come about from retagging a cow incorrectly, changing a numbering system, a poorly planned system or reusing tags. Or perhaps the tag color is what makes the ID unique but the tag color does not get recorded. Does your system need review? Have a method to replace lost tags any time cows go through the chute that minimizes chance of confusion. If you don't already, record the bangs tag with the cow's permanent ID for a backup. Any cow that receives a treatment requiring a withdrawal period needs to be clearly identified as part of good stewardship for a safe food supply.

The other items on the record keeping pitfalls list include unrecorded calf birth dates, or missing calf sex, calf weight, weaning date or cow age. Depending on your use of individual records these potential problems may have a varying impact.

The new year is a good time to review the existing record keeping system and see what improvements are needed to ensure you have the data available to assess herd performance. Do you have the information you need to make sound management decisions about the cow/calf enterprise and troubleshoot problems? If the new year has you rethinking your entire record keeping system check out the publication *Production Records for Cow/Calf Producers* <http://www.bookstore.ksre.ksu.edu/pubs/MF3298.pdf>. You can't manage what you don't measure.