

Reporting the Whole Story

Keep data collection accurate and simple this calving season.

by *Jaclyn Krymowski*

The rush of calving season comes with a laundry list of things to do. What should be near the top — although easily lost in the shuffle — is accurate recordkeeping and data collection.

For day-to-day, on-farm applications, the importance of having good records is obvious: Records are pivotal for a wide range of practical things like parentage, tracking growth rates and managing treatments.

However, records and data can improve far more than private herds. Producers who are invested in breed associations have the capability to play an active role in breed advancement and improvement. This is as simple as keeping and submitting accurate data in a timely manner.

“We like as much reproductive information as we can get,” says Laura Loschke, records supervisor for the American Hereford Association (AHA).

What is worth reporting?

The moment a calf hits the ground, documentation and processing are the first steps to monitoring its lifetime performance.

For the calf, this includes the basic preliminary information including dam and sire registration numbers, sex and birthdate. Genetic information (i.e., horned or polled) and method of service — natural, artificial insemination (AI) or embryo transfer — must also be noted.

This data is not just about the calf. Each animal contains important data to build up its sire’s expected progeny difference (EPD) reliability. This is especially important for young sires, who need to increase the reliability of their genomic information with concrete, phenotypic data. Birth weight, for example, is an important metric to document for traits like calving ease.

Other measurements, like the dam’s calving ease and teat and udder scores, trace back to her sire as well. Information on females is a key part of strategic mating. Reported data on your cows can complement genomic data and improve reliability on individual EPDs.

Strategies for accuracy

While Hereford breeders are not required to submit their data to AHA, it is strongly encouraged. The Association’s Whole Herd Total Performance Records (TPR™) program makes this process easier and helps producers make more informed breeding decisions. Participation in the program is mandatory for members who want EPDs reported on their animals.

In fact, Loschke reports approximately 85% of the Association’s calving records are obtained this way.

Producers enrolled in Whole Herd TPR have access to AHA’s online registry system called MyHerd. Enrolled members can log into the system at any time and follow the prompts to enter certain information.

Nonetheless, Loschke stresses the importance of writing everything down by hand first. “You never know what might get missed or not turned in,” she says. “Do not guess on any weights or any data. Get scales and make sure your numbers are accurate.”

Likewise, associations have to trust their breeders are submitting accurate information and reporting all of their calf crop.

“Without precise collection, we could never know the accuracy of the data,” Loschke continues. “There really isn’t room for error. However, we have to work with the data that is sent to us and trust that it is accurate and precise.”

Timing is important to record keeping. Not only does this prevent lost information, it increases accuracy.



To determine the most accurate birthweight, calves need to be weighed on a scale within 24 hours after birth. Hereford breeders who report this data must submit weights of all calves born alive.

Even if calves are not going to be registered, they must be documented in the Whole Herd TPR system. This is important because submitting all calves as a contemporary group is the only way to get an accurate picture of how your herd and individual animals stack up.

The same reasoning applies to other reported data such as weaning and yearling weights. Animals raised in the same herd and environments, known as a contemporary group, provide especially valuable information to paint a true picture of genetic strengths and weaknesses. If data on only the best animals are reported, their true value is not highlighted because they have not been compared to their lesser cohorts in the herd.

Take home

Herds of all sizes have data worth sharing. This not only improves individual animals; it also strengthens and improves the breed. Having all the data in the world means nothing if it is inaccurate or unreported.

Breed associations have no way of knowing what goes unreported each year, and only producer-shared data can provide the full scope of what is happening in the field. Even with the rise of genomic information, genotyping cannot tell the whole story without phenotypic data.

Before calving season is in full swing, breeders should take a moment and review what is and is not acceptable data collection. Knowing how to document and where to send the information ahead of time makes it that much easier to create and track records when calves begin to drop. **HW**