

## **Weighing Calves: Valuable or Not?**

The main objective of all beef cattle producers should be to focus on each and every cow in the herd to ensure that she is performing according to her job description. Producers need a list of cow performance expectations (1 calf every 365 days, weaning weight equal to 50% of cow weight, healthy calf, etc.) and then perform an annual evaluation to ensure that your employee is meeting the boss's expectations. As a result, the cowherd should experience an increase in the production (weaning weight per cow exposed, number of calves weaned per cow exposed, etc) or a decrease in cost of production. How can this be done, if accurate and individual records are not kept.

What information should be kept? Well, that depends on the operation and situation. For the commercial cow-calf producer, I think the records need to include individual birth dates and weights (if possible), weaning weights and a measure of quality (grade), yearling weight and grade (if kept on farm), health and treatment records, and any additional feedlot and carcass information, if applicable.

Obtaining individual animal weights are needed for individual performance records. The performance records are necessary for selecting superior producing cows and bulls in the herd and for culling the lower producing, undesirable animals from the herd. We need to give the pink slip to the cow that produces that poor-quality calf, that weighs 200 lbs. less than his herdmates or can the bull that sires 30 calves that weigh 20% less than the rest of weanlings. In addition, records help us make management decisions in regards to selecting replacement females (not always the largest) and bulls to increase overall performance of the herd.

To start a record keeping system, each individual must be identified within the herd. After that, recording the information in a pocket red-book or on the computer is the task. Although this task is often the least favorite of cattle producers, it is one of the most important. If a livestock scale is necessary to obtain weights, then contact through your University of Missouri Extension Livestock Specialist, your local Cattlemen's group, local ag store, or neighbor. If you need assistance, give your livestock specialist a call.

