THE DATA DIVE

by Esther Tarpoff, director of performance programs

Spring Calving is Coming, Keep the Right Records

As spring calving season approaches, it's important to have a plan set in place for quality recordkeeping.

Birth data sets the foundation for the calf's contemporary group that will follow through for many traits for the life of the calf. Recording and submitting quality records taken at calving is crucial. But what measures should be recorded at the calving event for both the calf and the dam?

When to record?

Data recorded at calving time should be recorded within 24 hours of birth. Collecting birth weights within 24 hours of calving provides the most accurate measurement of a calf's true birth weight. It ensures the calf hasn't put on or lost a significant amount of weight since birth.

What to record?

There are several data points that should be collected at calving, for both the calf and the dam.

For the **calf,** recording tag, tattoo, sex, sire, dam, date of birth, recipient dam if an embryo transfer, calving ease, birth weight. In addition, if the calf dies prior to weaning, it is important to still record the calf in the calving book, being sure to include a birth disposal code for the cause of death.

For the **dam**, calving is the time to record scores for teat size and udder suspension.

How to measure?

When measuring birth weights on calves, using a digital or spring scale is the best method of obtaining the actual birth weight of the calf and the only method accepted by the Association. Options like hoof tapes or heart and girth measurements provide only an estimated weight, often overestimating the weight of smaller calves and underestimating the weight of larger calves. Digital and spring scales eliminate the estimation factor.

Birth weight is the greatest recorded trait each year. In fiscal year 2023, there were more than 371,000 birth weights submitted to Angus Herd Improvement Records (AHIR®).

For calving ease scores, use the 1-to-5 scoring scale from the Association. Table 1 lists the scores and their description. While all females can have a calving ease score record, only calving ease scores from first-calf heifers are utilized in the calving ease traits.

Table 1: ***Scores used for calving ease.***

Score	Description
1	No assistance
2	Some assistance
3	Mechanical assistance
4	Cesarean assistance
5	Abnormal delivery

For the dam, birth of the calf is the time to collect scores on her udder. Teat and udder scores are collected at calf birth, because that is a critical time in that calf's life to ensure colostrum is received. If a calf is unable to nurse after birth because of udder problems, inadequate colostrum intake can have long-lasting effects for the calf.

Teat size and udder suspension are both scored on the combined worst quarter of the udder, and each trait is scored independently on a 1-to-9 scale. While teat and udder traits are still undergoing research, many members are recording these scores.

In fiscal year 2023, there were more than 47,000 scores submitted for each teat size and udder suspension. For more information about scoring teat size and udder suspension, visit *www.angus.org* for a scoring guide or watch how-to video on AngusTV.

SCAN TO WATCH
www.youtube.com/watch?v=lxy2mygTePM

How to record

Each member has their own system for data collection. Some members choose to use a notebook and hand record the information.

Others use the Angus Black Book, while others use a digital device or the calving book feature in the Angus Mobile app.

After collection of quality and accurate records, the next step is reporting the data to the American Angus Association to have those phenotypes included in the weekly National Cattle Evaluation.

Data recorded from calving is what sets the contemporary group that will remain with the calf. Calving ease scores are used in calculation of calving ease direct (CED) and calving ease maternal (CEM). Birth weights influence the birth weight (BW) expected progeny difference (EPD) and are used for other growth EPDs. Currently, teat size and udder suspension scores are being used in research for each of those traits. It's important to collect and report accurate data to ensure the best genetic selection tools for you and your customers.

Also remember, calves that were born a year ago are approaching yearling age. Data to collect during the yearling age window is outlined in the January 2023 "By the Numbers" column in the *Angus Journal.*

On behalf of the Association, we wish everyone a successful spring calving season. If any questions arise, call the Association at 816-383-5100. If you would like additional resources for data collection, visit *www.angus.org/university*. Staff members are happy to help and guide you to whatever resources you need. AJ

Editor's note: If you have questions, contact the Association at 816-383-5100.