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Western Beef Resource Committee

# Cattle Producer's Library

Introduction Section

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## INTRODUCTION

### Cow-Calf Management Guide & Cattle Producer's Library

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The Total Beef Program is a collection of fact sheets that are resources for any size cow-calf operation. Material in the cow-calf section has been developed by a regional committee made up of Cooperative Extension System animal scientists and industry representatives from Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

The committee set the following objectives:

1. To develop or collect as complete a set of informative material as can be found that has a bearing on the cow-calf operation. This material has been put into a **Cattle Producer's Library**. The information in the Library is in brief, easy-to-read fact sheets that deal with specific subjects. They are written by specialists that the committee considered the best authorities in a particular subject area.
2. To make the Cattle Producer's Library meaningful by developing a **Management Guide** that would tie this information to the biological cycles of the cow and to the ranching activities that go on throughout the year. The Management Guide is designed to give meaning to these activities by defining by objective the reason for each action. The Guide also points out some important things to remember while engaged in these activities. That Guide has a **planning-ahead section** to help make the next activity in that biological cycle easier or more productive.
3. To develop support material for the Management Guide in the form of videocassettes or slide-tape sets.

This Management Guide is written to remind the beef producer of the critical times where attention to details of management will pay big dividends. The material presented and the guides hopefully will suggest some things that you can do or adapt to your operation that will be profitable to you.

Regardless of where you are or how you operate, you must manage within the confines of the biological facts or beef production. The following are facts that all cattle producers know and take for granted. Producers sometimes expect Mother Nature to bend her rules to fit their management plan. Facts that cannot be changed are:

1. An egg and a sperm must come together in the proper circumstances to make a new calf.
2. The length of pregnancy in beef cattle is approximately 282 days.
3. The normal cow takes approximately 40 days after calving to return to estrous and be prepared to start a new pregnancy.
4. The estrus cycle is approximately 21 days.
5. Puberty is a function of age and size.
6. Certain nutrients are required for growth and production.
7. Wide variation occurs in growth rate and in limits to that growth rate.
8. In most cases, the biological cycle of the cow must be managed within the climate and seasonal limitations of one locality.

9. Disease problems are a constant threat.

10. Cows and bulls pass on to their offspring both desirable and undesirable traits.

Every operator, facing the formidable task of managing a beef herd to a profitable level, must take these biological facts into consideration. This must be done within the abilities, limits, and philosophy of the operator and the specific skill, knowledge, physical facilities, terrain, climate, finances, and labor the cattle producer has.

Most ranch operators would say “yes” if asked the question, “Would you like to be better at what you do or what you are tomorrow, next week, and next year?” Would you give a “yes” answer?

The major problem that most cattle producers face in getting to where they want to be or where they want to go with their operation is that these objectives have not been answered clearly enough. Before you can really get on the road to where you want to go, you need to ask yourself some searching questions, and give yourself some honest answers.

**Why are you in cattle ranching?** Is it to use capital? Is it to employ yourself as a laborer? Is it to use your managerial skills? Is it to employ your family? Is it because you want to be an independent business person? Is it because you enjoy living in the country? Is it because you enjoy working with animals? Is it because you want to be identified with a romantic period in history?

You may have answered “yes” to all of these questions and justifiably so. They are all legitimate reasons for being in the cattle business. The priority that you place upon these reasons may have a bearing upon the return you receive to each of these reasons. This also will have an impact on the management philosophy that develops in your enterprise. For example, if you are in cattle ranching to employ members of your family, you may not want to become as labor efficient as possible. If you are in the cow business to use capital investments to get the most return possible, your philosophy of management will be quite different.

If you will identify why **you** are in beef cattle production and set goals to achieve the most return to your “why,” you will do a much better job of maximizing your returns.

## Goals in the Beef Game

What would a football game be without a goal? What would be the point of interest in a basketball game without the little hoop of iron hung on a frame at each end of the gym? Goals give meaning, objective, or focus to things. They allow for achievement. They give order and stability to a game, a program — or life for that matter. With definite goals, “game plans” can be developed to achieve the goals.

Goals must have the following characteristics:

### Be Clearly Defined and Firmly Fixed

They must be set, or clearly defined, and must remain firmly fixed. Can you imagine the frustration and anxiety of a basketball team or coach if the position of the goal were changed at any moment to another position on the court? Too often we are like this in our business objectives. We think somewhere down on the other end of the court there is a goal that we are going to make. But we are not real sure how we’ll count the points, what the goal will be, or where the end of the court is. Goals must be firmly fixed and identifiable.

### Be Achievable

Let’s make another sports analogy. Would anyone play basketball or would basketball have any meaning if the goal were smaller than the ball or so high that no one could put the ball through the hoop? Of course not.

### Have a Realistic Time Frame

Too often our goals are set with no time frame or with a time scheduled that is too narrow. Foreign visitors to this country frequently say that Americans are in too much of a hurry. We must be realistic in the time table we set for reaching our goals.

Let’s take a look at some overall goals of a beef enterprise. Most of these are attained at some level and are seldom listed as goals. Perhaps the first objective or “goal” is:

- **Return on Investments**—These investments are in land, feed, water, equipment, and other items required to operate a beef enterprise. In this day of high money costs, a return must be realized.
- **Provide Employment**—The enterprise could provide full-time employment or, as in the case of some beef operations, part-time employment. This can take the form of merchandising time that is otherwise unmarketable or labor time that is shared with other farm enterprises.
- **Use Resources**—This goal is often overlooked. It is established to use all of the energy derived from the land. It may be wasted ground such as ditch banks or drainage ditches. It may be using roughages in a crop rotation system or surplus feeds or our vast ranges for the grazing animals. The goal should be to use these resources to the fullest and still retain a maximum sustained yield of resources.
- **Personal Satisfaction**—If you won’t like cattle or if you don’t like the outside activities associated with cattle, then all other goals become much more elusive. One personal satisfaction that a herd of cattle can give is the opportunity to associate with other people with a common interest.
- **Achievement**—Though this is the last goal listed here, it is perhaps more important than all others, and is the basic reason for establishing intermediate goals. There must be some sense of achievement before one

can do well in anything. These achievements are reached by knowing you are making things better than they were. You are able to try new ideas or can set production (intermediate) goals and achieve them by your own plans and efforts.

Intermediate goals are the short-range objectives that, if we achieve successfully, move us closer to our main goal. In setting intermediate goals you are able to measure progress and achieve a sense of accomplishment.

The value of intermediate goals, again, may be explained by a football game analogy. A football team may be 70 yards from scoring a touchdown. Its ultimate goal is to win by scoring more points than the opposition. Team members know that touchdowns are seldom made on 70-yard plays. The game plan from that position on

the field calls for a series of first downs. The intermediate goal is to make another first down and continue to do so until the team is in scoring range. So the team's intermediate goals become not 6 points, but a series of first downs that will lead to scoring the touchdown or 6 points and achieving the goal.

The long range goals you set for your operation will depend on your answer to the original question, "Why are you in cattle ranching?" Don't forget that you also have to set some intermediate goals to measure your progress and to give you a sense of achieving.

Hopefully, this collection of materials and the Management Guide will help you reach your goals and give you the greatest possible returns to your **why** for being in cattle ranching.



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