



Foundation COMMENTARY

by R.L. "Bob" Hough, Ph.D.
Executive Vice President
North American Limousin Foundation

Why LIMS?

Generally the articles I have read in the past regarding LIMS (Limousin Inventory Management System), NALF's total herd reporting program, have focused on the cost savings. It is true that it is the most economical way to do business with NALF in terms of registration, performance reporting and transferring cattle. For \$15 per cow on the inventory, you can register any or all of their calves and transfer females up to 24 months of age and bulls up to 30. However, the cost savings is simply an added bonus for LIMS members. LIMS is really about producing the best, most unbiased performance data and EPDs for you and your customers.

I have referred many times to my article on page 60 of the *Limousin World* Herdbook Edition from this summer on the disastrous effects of biased reporting of weaning weights. LIMS is built around the complete and proper reporting of contemporary grouped weaning weights for all calves raised through weaning. With incomplete reporting, growth EPDs on calves reported are deflated and milk EPDs are biased. With complete reporting, selection can be accounted for in the yearling weights through a simple mathematical process that accounts for the culling of the inferior calves at weaning. If you did not weigh the inferior calves, the yearling data does not get that bonus.

LIMS involves a whole new way of thinking. Instead of registering calves, you are managing a cow inventory. That sometimes takes people a few minutes to get their head around. For spring-calving cows, inventories are due by February 15, 2011 (July 15 for fall-calving cows, but we'll stay with spring for demonstration purposes). Proper annual inventory alone is critical, because it helps make our Stayability EPD much less biased.

In late spring, LIMS members are asked for a heifer retention inventory. This gives us information on those heifers that are exposed to calve as two-year-olds. Included in this is beginning and ending dates where they were exposed to become pregnant. This data is vitally important for our development of the Heifer Pregnancy EPD. This has long been a weakness for the breed and only through collection of this data can we develop the EPD. It is from the next year's inventories and calving records that we complete the loop in having all the data for the EPD.

Of course birth weights can be submitted anytime with the majority recorded in the fall. However, with LIMS there is no cost for registration or performance reporting.

Many people take advantage of this and get their birth weights recorded in the spring to be included in the fall International Genetic Evaluation. Birth weights are not mandatory, because you only have a small window to catch a birth weight and some get missed.

In the fall, it is mandatory to submit weaning weights and chute scores on all calves raised to weaning or the disposal code information for those calves that were lost. I have already discussed weaning weights which is the linchpin to the whole program, but just as important are the chute scores for docility. The two reasons we are on the 'no-buy' list for too many order buyers and feedlots is for bad disposition and poor marbling. It is imperative we collect chute scores on all of our cattle in full contemporary groups, so we sort the good disposition cattle from the poor disposition cattle with unbiased EPDs.

Also important is the voluntarily reporting of mature cow weight and body condition scores (BCS). The BCS system of 1 through 9 is explained on BIF Guidelines found on www.nalf.org. Remember, we cannot use one without the other. Our ultimate goal is to produce a mature cow Maintenance Energy EPD. This will be expressed in mcals per month, which amounts to a two-digit EPD that is easily interpreted in terms of differentiating between animals.

That brings us back to inventory time. We are working with our computer software company to automatically generate a 'no data reported list' in 2012, so you have one last chance to fill in the mandatory records. The cows that do not meet minimum reporting requirements, weaning and docility score or reason code of donor or calf died, will be deactivated, and subject to a monetary penalty to be reactivated.

You cannot forget about the yearlings. Turning in yearling weights and ultrasound data will update the EPDs, even if the animal has numeric accuracies. Profit-minded commercial producers want all the data they can get and it will pay you to collect it for them.

Ultimately LIMS makes you a better breeder because you are working with better data. You need to make the shift from registering cattle to managing an inventory. From a breed perspective, LIMS certainly makes Limousin a more competitive breed in the commercial beef industry. The added bonus is you save some money by joining LIMS, so consider it icing on the cake.