



Priorities First

Identifying Management Priorities in the Commercial Cow-Calf Business
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Identifying Management Priorities

Beef producers and specialists alike are confronted with mountains of information that is often presented as stand alone facts and principles. This information needs to be integrated and applied according to economic priorities within the cow-calf enterprise. Prioritizing management activities and aligning the industry's information resources with these priorities is, thus, an important step toward improving producer profitability.

Results: Based on the responses of more than 200 successful producers and beef industry specialists, the findings of the survey are detailed below. The table provides a list of the primary management categories in order of priority ranking. The most important subcategory within each management area is also shown.

Rank	Management Category	1 st Ranked Subcategory
1	Herd nutrition	Cowherd nutrition
2	Pasture & range	Stocking rate
3	Herd health	Calves pre-weaning
4	Financial	Cost accounting
5	Marketing	Marketing calves
6	Production	Breeding management
7	Genetics	Bull genetic merit
8	Labor	Hired
9	Information	Reproductive data
10	Harvested forages	Below industry cost
11	Identification	Cow ID
12	Natural resources	Healthy riparian areas
13	Biosecurity	Product handling
14	Facilities & equipment	Processing/sorting/handling
15	Technical support	Veterinarian

Objectives

- Identify and rank management priorities in the cow-calf business.
- Provide producers with a “roadmap” to better organize and prioritize various aspects of their operations according to economic importance.
- Encourage producers to evaluate and deploy their time, money and other resources on the most important operational priorities.

The purpose of the project was to develop a management priorities roadmap for U.S. cow-calf producers—a roadmap that will help producers get “first things first” as they face the challenge and complexity of managing their business.



Key Messages ■ Summary of Top 10 Overall Rankings

- Herd nutrition**—respondents were in strong agreement making nutrition the number one ranked management priority.
- Pasture and range management**—respondents emphasized grazing as the preferred route to insuring adequate nutrition for the cowherd.
- Herd health**—results underscore to the importance of this area, with primary emphasis on disease prevention.
- Financial**—this management area was considered ‘foundational to profitability’ by two-thirds of respondents.
- Marketing**—special emphasis on marketing the calf crop through the most appropriate channel.
- Production**—primary emphasis on (1) calving and breeding; (2) weaning protocols and replacement female selection; and (3) culling decisions and herd bull management.
- Genetics**—ranked higher among producers than specialists, and higher still among producers who retain ownership of their calf crop through the feedlot.
- Labor**—ranked in the middle of the pack, but received higher marks from producers managing larger herds.
- Information management**—subtopics ranking high in this category included herd reproduction and cattle inventory information with overall cattle performance records, health and weaning information rounding out the list.
- Harvested forages**—respondents were keen on maintaining lower than industry-average costs in this category.

Priorities First: Identifying Management Priorities in the Commercial Cow-Calf Business, by Tom Field, Ph.D., Fort Collins, Colorado, and sponsored by the American Angus Association, is the first comprehensive effort to prioritize management and economic issues for cow-calf producers. (A detailed summary can be found at www.angus.org or contact the American Angus Association, 816.383.5100 to obtain a printed copy of *Priorities First*.)