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**Y**ou may not be a massive fan of Formula 1, but if you want to look at an industry working at extremely tight competitive margins, then it is an interesting business to highlight, particularly when you are considering what value the use of data can be.

In these cars, every second of every lap, more than 150,000 measurements are taken and then transmitted and processed for further analysis by the team.

They know this information will allow them to make informed, evidence-based decisions on how to make the car faster now and in the future.

Let's compare this with the farm, where there are numerous complex systems at play and frequently the outcome of a failure can be a significant reduction in profit.

How do we compare at being able to harvest and analyse data and use it to our advantage?

Perhaps one way to answer this is to test yourself. For instance, the following questions are all pertinent to your profitability, but do you know the answer?

#### WITHIN THE PAST YEAR...

- What percentage of your cows did you get in-calf by 100 days post-calving?
- What percentage of calves under three months of age died?
- How many cases of mastitis for every 100 cows did you have?
- How many cows did you cull?

If you know the answer to these or could easily dig it out, then chances are your recording and analytical methods are reasonably robust.

However, if the answer is: "I don't know and have no way of finding out," then you are likely to be missing out on a significant opportunity to understand your business better.

Obviously, the above questions are just a few examples of a large number that could be deemed very relevant to profitability, but it does illustrate the point that records and analysis are important to your business.

So if we are going to embrace the use of records we need to know what to record, how to record and what to do with the information we gain.



GEOFF PAGOTTO

## Records – are they an evil necessity or a vital tool?

### What do we record?

In theoretical terms it is only worth recording if it answers the following key questions:

- Does the parameter have an influence on health, welfare or profitability?
- Can it be reliably measured? For instance, if different personnel are required to record the parameter will they all record the same?
- Do we understand what the accepted target should be for the farm?
- If the parameter is considered off target, can measures be taken to correct the situation? There is no point measuring things for the sake of it.

### How to record?

Other than the specific requirements that may be on the farm, there are no right or wrong answers to this. However, the following practical aspects should

be considered:

- Is everyone who is responsible clear as to the recording protocols?
- Is the method reliable, user-friendly and unlikely to be lost?

Normally this means a paper record is going to be the easiest method, but if so, can the structure of this be made such that the areas to be recorded are clearly marked so they can be easily accessed at a later date?

For instance, rather than have a diary where fertility events are mixed in with mastitis treatments etc, have a diary where there are separate sections for each area.

- Does it avoid excess repetition – the bane of recording is duplication of effort. Are there systems in place to avoid this?
- When information is to be transcribed on to a computer system or taken by the milk recorder, is it clearly set out and readable to avoid transcription error?

### What to do with the information?

Use it. There is no point writing information down if we don't use it to our advantage – it will simply be an evil necessity. The two primary areas where we can use this information is either to drive management, for example, service data to generate lists of which animal require pregnancy diagnosis, and/or to analyse performance.

However, if we are to use it, we must make it easy to do so. Hours spent trawling information and manually processing are not conducive to using it. Data must be set out so clear patterns can be seen easily. This can be achieved on paper, but in most cases the use of computer software will make life simpler.

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