

## IDEA EXCHANGE

# RECORD KEEPING

### THE BACKBONE OF PUREBRED CATTLE HERD MANAGEMENT

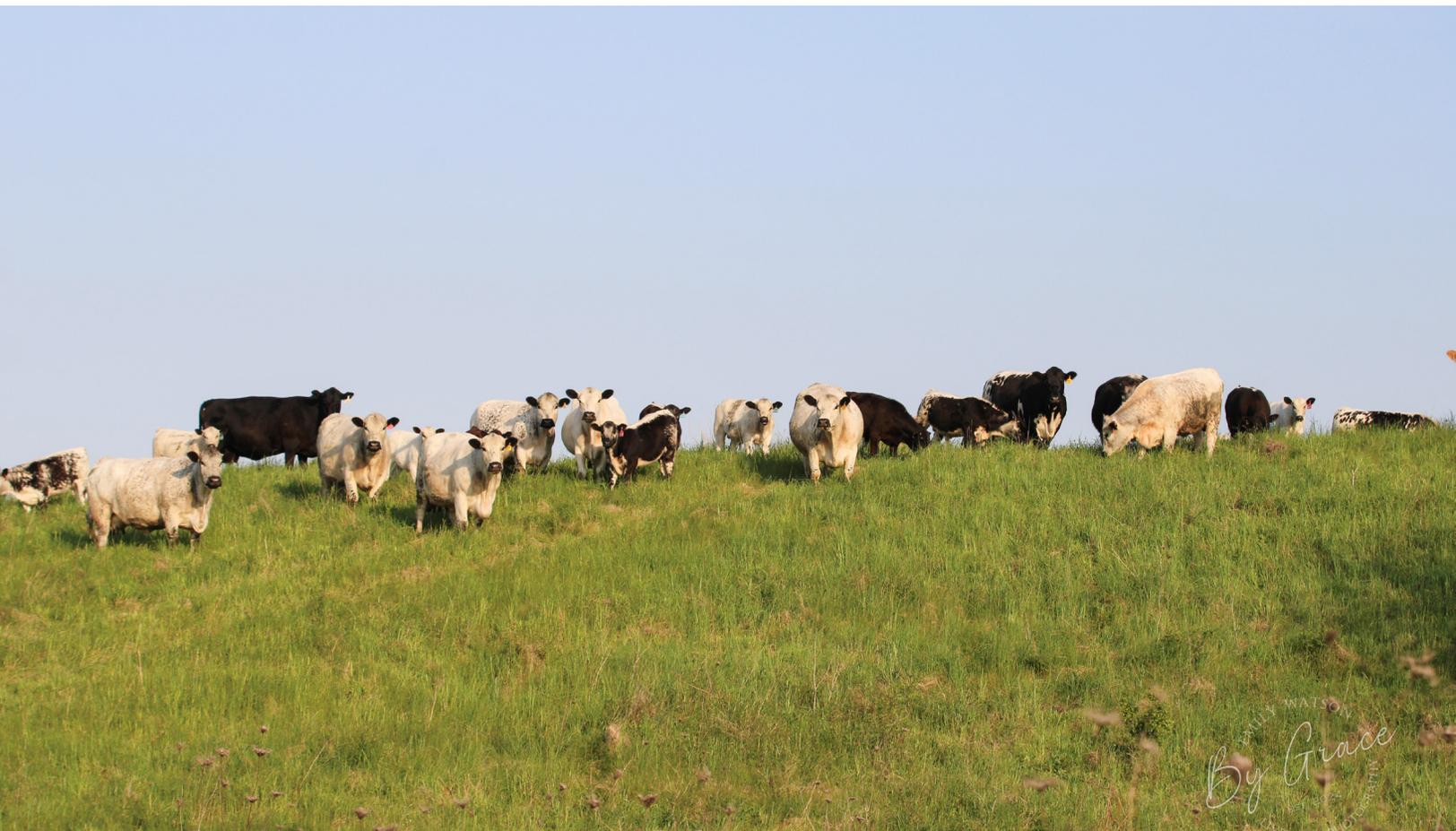
Record keeping, data collection, and information sharing are not often the hottest topics of conversation among cattle breeders. Too often, they are perceived as time-consuming, difficult to organize, and of uncertain value. However, this edition of the Idea Exchange aims to change that perception. We hope to provide you with practical tips, sound reasoning, and positive motivation to enhance how you record and utilize information about your herd.

Effective record-keeping practices can be summed up with the terms: **Needing-Proceeding & Leading**. There is a critical **need** to keep detailed records on calving, parentage, health protocols, performance, and breeding groups. To **proceed** effectively, these records should be reviewed regularly to identify positive trends and areas of concern. This review process supports informed decision-making and goal-setting. For example - there may be additional aspects/levels of information to be added into the program. By maintaining and analyzing accurate records, breeders are better equipped to **lead** their herds toward a more prosperous and productive future. Consistent information gathering also opens sharing opportunities to improve the breed overall.

Setting up manageable recording routines and dedicating time to maintain them are crucial first steps. Most farms and ranches operate with a team, and within even a small team, there is usually one person who finds the task of recording information more engaging and is willing to go the extra mile. It's important that everyone on the team values this person's role and adapts to the routines they establish.

Utilizing recorded information requires a dedicated approach. Identifying positives, difficulties, and changes over time is not always easy, but it is essential. This process should foster discussions that lead to informed decision-making and a unified focus. In the best-case scenario, it will be efficient and productive, fostering a sense of confident determination toward the future.

We hope this edition of the Idea Exchange inspires you to embrace record keeping as a vital component of herd management. By doing so, you will not only improve your own operation but also contribute to the advancement of the breed as a whole.



# INPUT

*from Industry Professionals  
& Fellow Breeders >>*

## **JORDON UNDERHILL** UNDERHILL SPECS

The old saying "data is knowledge" still stands today and will stand into the future. In these modern times, any successful business needs to have laser focus. Yes, farming is a beautiful way of life, but it also has to be about business to be sustainable and to provide for your family. Let's not hide behind the word "profitability." Everyone in the chain needs to turn a profit, or you're quickly out of business.

Recording, tracking, and analyzing data allows you to genetically and financially improve your business. At Underhill SPECS, we use a combination of Excel spreadsheets and CattleMax software to guide us and those who work within our farm business.

For us, data is much more than genetic tests and EPDs. The primary data we track includes:

- Average weaning weight per cow per year
- Total lifetime profitability per cow
- Daughters/sons in production per cow
- Notes on type improvements required per cow for sire matching
- Udder scores on every cow (1-5) during the first week of each lactation
- Genetic testing per cow
- Total cost of production per cow, herd bulls, and young stock

When 4-H tours come through our barn, I say, "Know your costs." If you don't know your costs, you will never actually know if you are turning any profit or not. Modern farmers need to think like both farmers and CEOs of their operations.

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## **TRACY HERBERT** EXTENSION AND COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR, BEEF CATTLE RESEARCH COUNCIL

A good record-keeping system helps take the guesswork out of management decisions. By recording accurate and up-to-date information, you can make better decisions, turn information into actions, and achieve goals like becoming more efficient and profitable. The Beef Cattle Research Council (BCRC), funded by a portion of your Canadian Beef Cattle Check-Off, offers free record-keeping courses for beef producers working to strengthen their farm record-keeping and analysis skills. Visit [www.beefresearch.ca/courses](http://www.beefresearch.ca/courses) for more information.



## **TRACEY DURIEZ FOSTER** DESERT ACRES

At Desert Acres Speckle Park, our approach to data and record-keeping has evolved almost yearly, reflecting the ongoing addition of various tools. While complex, they have significantly contributed to the smooth running and enhanced performance of our breeding operation. When I first started my purebred herd, it was small and easily managed with just a handwritten calving book. Today, I've incorporated multiple digital sheets on my computer as well as a yearly binder.

In my first couple of years, I quickly realized that obtaining results from the three major genetic tests would save me both heartache and money by allowing me to make more informed breeding decisions. Since then, I've added genetic testing for leptin and other herd improvements through Q-Select from Quantum Genetix and more recently, the Neogen Igenity program. These tools have been invaluable in achieving the results I aim for.

While there isn't a genetic test for scurs yet, I continue to manually record scur occurrences in my individual cattle records, especially when they appear in the offspring of females who don't visually present them. Other characteristics, like udder and hoof scores, are also documented by hand. I haven't incorporated scans into my program yet, as that service is not readily available in my area.

Our system is always evolving. In my view, the more information I have, the better breeding decisions I can make. However, it's important to remember that, in the end, Mother Nature always has the final say.



## KEVIN RIOUX WAR GENETICS

What makes great cattle? That probably depends on who you're talking to, but we believe if you can't measure it, then it's very difficult to improve any specific trait. We need to get better at collecting more data at key moments without negatively impacting the animal's natural progression.

Traits like calving ease, scrotal size, and weaning weight are the most improved in many breeds because they are easy to measure, keep records on, and compare data. The challenge is measuring other important traits without making the process cumbersome. For example, factors like milk production and fertility are also influenced by nutrition and good reproductive programs. So, without clear and accurate records, it's difficult to capture the true genetic potential of these traits.

At WAR Genetics, we're committed to improving our record-keeping efforts. With the proper data, you can make great cattle, not just good cattle, in the same amount of time.



## \*Start Young

Building enthusiasm for keeping and using records can start at an early age and develop into a valuable skill. Whether it's tracking daily weather, sports statistics, or family surveys, an interest in collecting and using information can be sparked early on.

For our youngest CSPA Junior Association members, starting with simple records like color patterns or male/female calving numbers is a great first step. Older members may advance to recording birthdates, sires/dams, and other critical data points. Setting up an easy and enjoyable system, whether it's a notebook, calving book, or digital tool, is key. Encourage discussions about observations and how information can inform decision-making as they continue to grow in the breed.

# BEST TOOLS & APPS FOR CANADIAN PUREBRED CATTLE RECORD KEEPING



## 1. CattleMax

Widely used by Canadian breeders, CattleMax offers cloud-based herd management that includes features like tracking calving, breeding, and health records. This app is also compatible with CCIA (Canadian Cattle Identification Agency) tags.

## 2. Herdly

Herdly, a mobile app, helps breeders track breeding, health, and performance records in the field. It works offline, which is useful for ranchers in remote areas without internet access. It's known for its simple design and ease of use.

## 3. AgSights

Based in Canada, AgSights provides a robust solution for genetic evaluations, data collection, and herd management. Its integration with Canadian systems and local support makes it ideal for breeders looking to improve their herd's genetics while staying compliant with national standards.

## 4. Performance Beef

This app is widely used for tracking feed performance and herd health. While some feed services may vary depending on location, Canadian breeders can still benefit from its features like real-time weight gain tracking and cost analysis.

## 5. Google Sheets or Excel

Spreadsheet tools are highly customizable for purebred breeders who prefer flexibility. Many breeders use Google Sheets or Excel to track calving, breeding, financial data, and performance, adapting the software to their specific needs.

## 6. BCI Cattle Tracker

While developed in the U.S., BCI Cattle Tracker is available in Canada and useful for managing cow-calf operations. It helps with tracking calving, vaccination schedules, and breeding data.

## 7. iLivestock

This mobile app is useful for tracking individual cattle records, including health and breeding data. It's popular among Canadian ranchers who need a mobile-friendly solution for data collection on the go.

## 8. Cattle Krush

Cattle Krush is a decision-making app that helps breeders track market trends, feeding costs, and performance records. Though it's more tailored toward commercial operations, its market analysis and breeding tools are useful for purebred breeders aiming to maximize profitability.

*Thank you to everyone who contributed to  
this edition of the Idea Exchange!*