

LIVESTOCK

Weight measurement enables effective management

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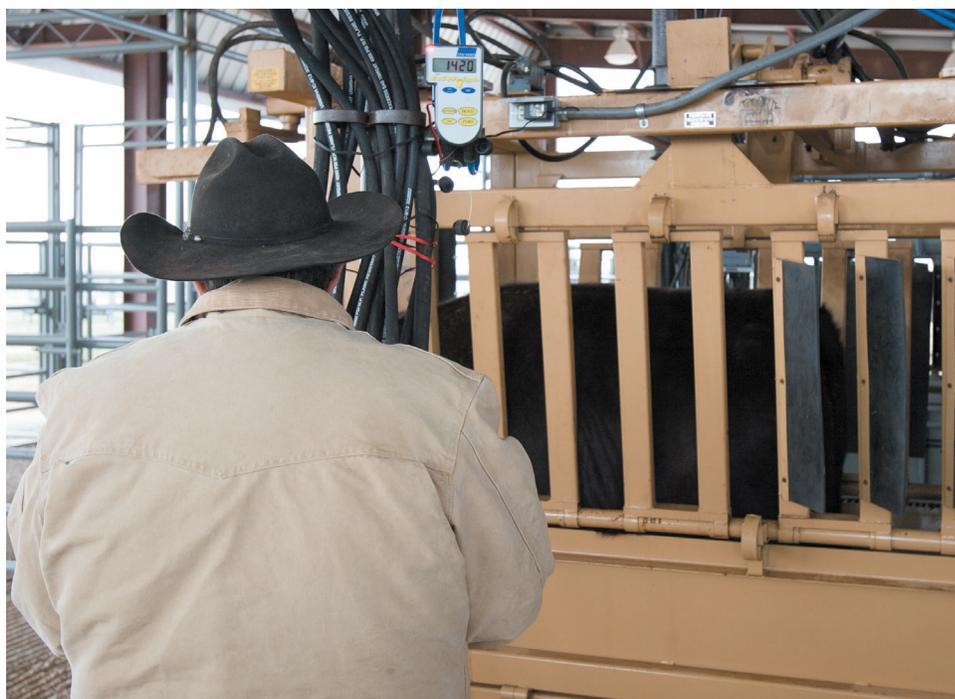
We commonly hear the phrase “you can’t manage what you don’t measure,” especially in regards to forage production and pasture management. How-

ever, this statement applies to many other facets of beef cattle production. Cattle are managed, in many ways, according to their weight. Stocking rates, feeding programs, and dosages for antibiotics and dewormers are all based on an animal’s weight. In public markets, all cattle except for breeding females are sold in terms of weight. Given the importance of weight in cattle production, it is important to capture weight data when necessary to make good management decisions. Below are a few ways that this data can be collected.

Individual chute scales are effective in serving a number of purposes. Perhaps their most important function is in determining correct dosages for treating livestock. It is very important to use the correct dosage because under-dosing can be ineffective and overdosing can be costly. Many of today’s antibiotics cost upwards of \$4 per milliliter and are administered at 1 milliliter per hundred pounds. If producers are overestimating the

weight and overdosing, it does not take long for this number to add up. Chute scales can also be used to collect individual weight data on cows and calves to measure productivity. This data can then be used to make culling decisions when appropriate. Additionally, during scheduled workings when all animals come through the chute for vaccinations, weights can be collected so that an average weight can be calculated and used to design supplementation programs most effectively.

Pen scales are a great tool for collecting weights on all types of livestock. These are nice for collecting average weights on a large number of cattle in a quick manner. They typically have tremendous value for stocker operators. It is very important to have accurate weights in order to make good marketing decisions. If an operation is selling cattle directly off the ranch, accurate weights are essential. A good set of pen scales can be a sizeable investment, so these are typically used by larger operations. ►



An alternative option is to use the truck scales at a local feed store, truck stop, etc., to get an average weight of a set of cattle. There is usually no cost to use these scales. Your only costs will be time, the fuel to get the cattle there, and wear and tear on your vehicle and trailer. This is an option that many people may forget.

Another type of scale that can be useful is on your pickup feeder. This ensures the amount of feed that you are providing is the desired amount. Without scales on a

feeder, you should at least know the amount your feeder contains when full, and calibrate to know how much is released with each "click" on a trip-hopper or per a certain amount of time with auger-fed systems. However, these amounts will vary depending on the type of feed you are using, the amount in the feeder and the angle of the truck if you are not on a flat surface. If emptying the feeder to one set of cattle, this is not a problem. However, if you are splitting a feeder between multiple

sets of cattle, errors can occur. Once again, underfeeding can result in decreased performance, and overfeeding is overspending.

My hope is that this article causes producers to ask two questions. First, how am I determining weights currently to help make management decisions, and can I improve upon it? Second, would purchasing one of these types of scales be a wise investment? The answer will vary by producer, but I encourage everyone to ask the questions. ■