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#### Record Keeping Time

It's the time of year, that makes 4-H parents pull their hair out! It's 4-H record book time in our office. We've had some philosophical debates, whether they are records, diaries or awards applications, whatever you consider them, they are valuable.

Few people really enjoy keeping records, but they can be a great help when you need them. Cow/calf producers require considerable investment into their operation. Good records enable producers to make sound management decisions.

Records for cow/calf producers fall into two main categories-those about the herd, and those that pertain to the individual animal. Herd-level measurements such as pregnancy rate and weaning weight per cow exposed are critical in management decisions that affect the entire herd.

Health records are most likely vaccination records that detail when, how, what products were used. These can be helpful from year to year to remember what products were used and if any withdrawal times need to be observed.

Pasture use records, noting the number and type of animals and body weights of animals along with precipitation records, can help guide decisions on optimal stocking rates and help with developing a drought management plan.

There is no one right way to keep records, Records can be handwritten, kept in a notebook, calendar or sticky notes! There are options for data management and automated reports with electronic records. Probably the most widely used tool is the Red Book, Calving book developed by the beef specialists at the University of Idaho and the National Cattlemen's Beef Association. There is an Excel versions ([www.beefusa.org/redbookworksheet.aspx](http://www.beefusa.org/redbookworksheet.aspx)) that is recommended as a backup to the paper copy. Because those can get lost.

Some producers use Google Forms to customize data collection. This is a free tool that enables you to gather production and operation data in the field using your smartphone or tablet, and then download it to your computer as a spreadsheet.

Technology may not be the answer for everyone, but it is handy for storing and reporting data. Make sure your recordkeeping, is telling you what you need to know, that you are comfortable using whatever form you choose. The more you know about key characteristics of your cows and herd, the better your management decisions and the better chance of reaching your production goals.