

# The Toolbox

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At our operations and even our homes we tend to not always have every tool that we may need. It may be that we need a seed drill, but it's more economical to lease one. Still, some tools are an absolute necessity like a pair of fencing plyers. From a management standpoint, there are tools that we might be able to do without, but others we really shouldn't do without.

Here is a short list of tools that every operation needs:

**1) Eyes:** Every operation needs good eyes on their herd. Health is probably the first thing that comes to mind and rightly so. However, this also overlaps with nutrition. Being able to assess body condition is critical for ensuring acceptable fertility rates, calf colostrum and subsequent calf vigor, for example.

**2) Tests Analyses:** Feed and forage analyses are exceptionally important tools for proper herd nutrition. With these tools in your toolbox, fertility and lbs. weaned per cow exposed will be more tightly managed during drought and winter instead of being left up to random chance. From calving to peak lactation, which is about 50 days, nutritional requirements will increase quickly. Peak lactation requirements are 12% crude protein (CP) and 60% TDN (energy). Cows in late lactation should be bred but still require 9-10% CP and 55% TDN. Even the "dry" cow should be monitored for body condition particularly during the cold snaps to come. The dry cow is still pregnant and needs to provide essential nutrients to the calf in-utero. This group of cows still need at least 7% crude protein and 50% TDN on a dry matter basis. Regarding baleage, high quality baleage put up at over 60% and particularly over 65% moisture is suspect for poor fermentation. Although the cattle will eat it, they can lose weight and precious body condition if it did not ferment as expected.



**3) Records:** Records are tools that are often overlooked or underappreciated. Evaluating body condition scores along with objective measurements such as scale weights bring another level of management power to understand if the herd is receiving appropriate nutrition or if other issues are underlying. Also, birthdate records can be a tool to gauge herd fertility as well as a tool for marketing a calf crop through a process verified program. Online record keeping is one tool that isn't necessarily needed but can be a big convenience particularly when multiple people are involved on the operation. CattleMax and Calf-Book are very nice tools. Calf-Book has the advantage of not needing cellular service at the time of use.

**4) Calendar:** The calendar is a tool that can give you either peace of mind or anxiety. When used as a planning tool for herd management it can help minimize issues. Dates such as "turn in bulls" and "remove bulls" takes the guess work out of our work days. Two of the biggest days on the calendar should be "breeding soundness exams" and "pregnancy check day". Reduce risk and improve profitability by performing breeding soundness exams on your herd bulls. Finally, pregnancy check day is the determination of whether the herd is functioning as expected and which cows are not performing.



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