



## Breed Improvement Article

# How do I know what data I need to collect?

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The options for data collection on Limousin cattle have exploded over the last couple of years. New options in the performance program include collection of data on things such as breeding records, udder scores, body condition scores, cow weights and frame size (hip heights). Add this to the traditional information such as birth, weaning and yearling weights and other traits such as ultrasound and the amount of information that can be collected on an animal can become somewhat overwhelming.

Data collection programs are geared towards collecting enough data in a format that can allow for conducting of a genetic evaluation for traits of interest. Breeders can then use the information to select for these traits.

In terms of deciding what information to collect there are a couple of considerations that should be taken into account.

- 1. What are my breeding goals?**
- 2. What are the costs?**

Ideally your breeding goals will be based upon what your customers need now and will need in the future. It takes time to breed beef cattle, and therefore breeders need to be thinking ahead to establish the information base needed to effectively breed future generations of seedstock.

For much of the data collected under the Whole Herd Reporting Program the cost is minimal, although there may be a time investment required. Udder scores, docility, scrotal size, body condition and frame size are all relatively cost free to collect. If a scale is available the cost to take weights is also minimal. The primary question in these cases then becomes, what are my breeding goals, or in other words what do my customers need now and in the future?

If your customers are using your genetics as a terminal type of sire, growth is likely a high information priority. If they are also retaining females out of your sires, then perhaps collecting udder scores, body condition, cow weights and frame size is important. Calving ease is also an area of vital importance to most cattle operations and birth weights and calving ease data is likely to be included in most breed improvement programs.

Examples of data that may cost somewhat more to collect include feed intake, carcass data and ultrasound records. These are more critical to assess in terms of value for money. If your customers retain ownership on their calves or are moving in that direction in the future ultrasound is a technology that should definitely be considered. As well, collecting of carcass records may be something that can add value to your seedstock.

If you do not know what your customers are doing or what they are planning into the future it is extremely difficult to target a breeding program and/or the data collection required to achieve your

breeding targets. Talk to your customers, and to your customers' customers to assess where you need to take your breeding program. Once you know your customers needs, data collection should fall neatly in to place.

Priorities identified for the Limousin breed in industry surveys include:

- 1. Docility**
- 2. Post Weaning Growth**
- 3. Carcass Characteristics**
  - a. Yield**
  - b. Marbling**

This should help to provide a starting point for a data collection program, as it identifies the need to collect information on docility, growth and carcass characteristics. The breed also has genetic evaluation available for these traits, with the carcass evaluation targeted for release with the Spring 2005 evaluation being conducted this fall.

It is important that if a breeder includes a piece of data in their breed improvement program that all data is reported on the herd as it allows for accurate comparison of genetic merit.

Breeders are reminded to report their data prior to the November 1st deadline to ensure that it can be included in the next EPD evaluation.