



A GREENER WORLD
Our Food. Our Farms. Our Future. Let's Choose!

A Greener World Technical Advice Fact Sheet No. 15

Record Keeping: Worthless or worthwhile?

Certified Animal Welfare Approved by A Greener World (AGW) has the most rigorous standards for farm animal welfare currently in use by any organization in North America. Its standards have been developed in collaboration with scientists, veterinarians, researchers and farmers across the globe to maximize practicable, high-welfare farm management.

Whatever type of livestock you keep you will find that the Certified Animal Welfare Approved by AGW standards require record keeping. But when you first look at the list of items that we require you to record, you could be forgiven for thinking that you'll be spending more time in the office than caring for your animals outside! But this really isn't the case.

First of all, if you have never kept farm records before we do not expect you to suddenly produce a perfect set of records before we even approve your farm. At your initial audit we will let you know what is required – and we will ask you to start keeping basic records before your next annual audit. But even though you have a year's grace period to get your records in place, our advice is: don't wait until the night before your second audit to start writing things down!

Secondly, you might think that you'll need a computer system or a farm assistant to help maintain your records. But while a computer can indeed help with farm management, there are much easier and simpler ways of keeping your records up to date.

Why keep records?

Certified Animal Welfare Approved by AGW asks for its farmers to keep records so that our auditors can see what has been happening on your farm between audits, and to ensure you are complying with the program.

However, a set of well-kept records can also be a very useful farm management tool in its own right, providing you with essential information about your farm business performance from year to year.

How often have you said to a farm visitor, "that's the cow whose calf died last year" or "that's the ewe that had triplets three years running" – only to have your husband, wife or farm hand disagree with you and say it was a different animal? Events that seem memorable when they occur may not always be as memorable a

few years down the line. After all, we are only human and we tend to recall the good and gloss over - or even forget – the bad. Good record keeping allows you to check what really happened – and act on it.

Business performance

A good set of records can provide you with valuable information that can really help to improve your farm's performance.

The basics may be as simple as knowing if a particular breeding animal is actually producing offspring. But good record keeping can also tell you if one breeding male is producing better results than another, if some meat animals are growing better than others, or whether or not one flock is producing more eggs.

Armed with information from your records you can look to maintain or improve the better traits available in your herd or flock – and eliminate the bad – by selecting your future breeding stock according to their performance.

Records can also help you to pick up problems sooner. Are current milk yields really lower than this time last year? Are meat animals taking longer to get to market weight? More importantly, by cross-checking with your other records – such as your feed records – you can hopefully identify any management changes you might have made that could be the cause.

By keeping regular records you can identify any suspected problems or changes in performance – and hopefully the underlying reasons. And the earlier you discover a potential problem, the easier it usually is to do something about it. Records can also help you to learn from your mistakes – or from innovation. If you do something different you will at least know the result.

What counts as a record?

You might think that keeping records will involve complicated and expensive systems, such as a computer. It is true to say that if you have access to a computer then it can be a very useful business administration tool. But there is absolutely no need to go and buy one to comply with the Certified Animal Welfare Approved by AGW program.

A notebook or diary in your pocket that you can use to jot down notes as you check the animals would count as a record. Similarly, a note on the kitchen calendar is also a record. Some farmers write their lambing information on the wall of the barn – this would be regarded as a record, too. Even noting the dam of a calf on the calf's own ear tag is a record.

As long as you can provide some evidence to the auditor that gives them the information they need, then it is a record. If you have never kept records before then a pocket notebook is a great way to start. And instead of standing in the field thinking 'I must remember that,' you can jot it down alongside the recorded

information you need! Obviously, the ideal would be to regularly transfer the information you keep in your daily notebook or on the calendar to properly designed record sheets. This helps keep everything nice and tidy so that you have the information you need on hand – and our auditors can easily find what they need. But this is not essential.

What do I need to record?

In order to comply with the Certified Animal Welfare Approved by AGW program you will need to start recording the following information as a minimum:

- Which animals you have brought into the farm and which have you sold – whether that is individual birds or animals (breeding stock or meat) or products of livestock – milk, eggs, wool
- Any animals that got sick, were treated or died – and the reason why (if you know)
- Any animals that were born and reared
- What are you feeding and how much.

See the appendix to this paper for some example record sheets that you can use or adapt.

Record keeping: time well spent

Under the Certified Animal Welfare Approved by AGW program you are expected to record certain key information. However, once you start to see the benefits of keeping records, you might also consider starting to record other more detailed information to help improve your future performance.

For example, two ewes might each have produced two lambs. The first ewe reared two beautiful big lambs and, even after a month or so, she still looked in great condition; the second ewe, however, reared two scrawny runts that took a lot of care – and your time – to get them to grow into fit and healthy animals. The better breeding line may have seemed obvious at the time but unless you kept a record, you might have forgotten this valuable information when it comes to selecting ewe lambs six or eight busy months down the line.

Summary

The record keeping required under the Certified Animal Welfare Approved by AGW program should not add greatly to your day's work. And with a little more effort, the records you keep could help with future decision making – and help make your farm more productive and profitable.

Appendix:

Example record keeping sheets

1. Medicine records

Date	Animal/group	Reason for treatment	Treatment/product used and amount	Standard withdrawal time	2x withdrawal time (as required for AWA sales)	Date animal/product can be sold
<i>Example 25 Nov 10 repeated 27 Nov 10</i>	<i>Steer 25</i>	<i>Pneumonia</i>	<i>15ml Liquamicin LA x 2</i>	<i>28 days</i>	<i>56 days</i>	<i>21 January 11</i>
<i>Example 25 Nov 10 repeated 27 Nov 10</i>	<i>Steer 25</i>	<i>Pneumonia</i>	<i>5ml banamine x2</i>	<i>4 days</i>	<i>8 days</i>	<i>5 December 10</i>

2. Medicines on farm

Name and amount of medicine/treatment	Date bought onto farm	Source	Batch number	Use by date
<i>Example 100ml Agricillin</i>	<i>15 October 10</i>	<i>Feed store</i>	<i>AN122220</i>	<i>August 2012</i>

3. Feed records

Animal or group of animals	Feed or supplement	Amount fed	Date start feeding	Date end feeding
<i>Example All cows (100)</i>	<i>RangeLand Year Round 8 CP Mineral 8% Phosphorus</i>	<i>Free choice</i>	<i>Year round</i>	<i>Year round</i>
<i>Example Twin bearing ewes (50)</i>	<i>85% rolled oat, 10% soy bean meal, 5% molasses mix</i>	<i>0.5lb/head increasing to 1.0lb/head</i>	<i>6 weeks pre- lambing 1 Mar 10</i>	<i>3 weeks post lambing approx 3 May</i>

4. Farrowing records – pigs

Date	Hut or pen	Sow	Born alive	Born dead	Deaths and cause if known	Weaning date	Number weaned
<i>Example 18 October</i>	<i>A3</i>	<i>Spotty</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>1 crushed 19 Oct 1 ? 22 October</i>	<i>13 December</i>	<i>9</i>

5. Birth and death records cattle, sheep, goats

Date	Cow/ewe/doe	Born	Birth weight	Wean date/age	Wean weight	Comments
<i>Example 4 February 2010</i>	<i>Cow 25</i>	<i>Heifer</i>	<i>102lb</i>	<i>10 October 10</i>	<i>500lb</i>	<i>Nice calf – keep for replacement?</i>
<i>Example 5 April 2010</i>	<i>Ewe 17 (Dora)</i>	<i>Twin ram lambs</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>15 August</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>Assisted lambing, ewe milked poorly. Cull?</i>

***Written by Anna Bassett (lead technical advisor, Certified Animal Welfare
Approved by AGW) 2009***

Record Keeping is one of A Greener World's Technical Fact Sheet range, designed to provide practical advice and support to farmers. For more information, visit agreenerworld.org.

KEYWORDS

Welfare; record keeping; business performance; audit;