Indians Develop
Beef Herd Improvement

by George Alstad*

Beef Cattle Improvement is a management program.
It is designed to increase total beef production through the use of records. Records in themselves will not guarantee success nor will they improve genetic makeup of animals. But correct use and interpretation of records will help cattlemen develop improved beef herds on the Indian Reservations.

Cal Emerson, Agricultural Agent in Navajo county, works with Hopi cattlemen in adapting the principles of the Arizona Beef Cattle Improvement program. He does so with the help of Edward LeViness, Area Livestock specialist, and Albert M. Lane, Livestock Specialist, all of whom are with the Cooperative Extension Service of the University of Arizona.

Economic benefits are reflected in increased weaning weights, higher percentage of calf crop, greater daily rates of gain, improved breeding. ☁

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Oral Agent Cal Emerson works with cattlemen during roundup in order to increase animal production. He brings along special gear to help in handling cattle. Pictures on these pages demonstrate how this is done. He relies on the help of Al Lane, Livestock Specialist, from Tucson and Edward LeViness, Area Livestock Specialist, all of whom are with the University of Arizona Cooperative Extension Service. At lower left, an Indian rancher is sorting calves from the range cows which are herded into the squeeze chute to be weighed and identified. Lower right, Emerson inserts a numbered ear tag for easy identification on the range without necessitating handling.
longevity and for your cattle greater appeal to buyers.

These are accomplished through the use of performance tested bulls. They then conduct their own selection of heifers through performance records.

Cal Emerson points out that the Arizona range lands largely lack fences thereby presenting one of the basic problems. He utilizes the opportunity when cattlemen are preparing for sales to hold demonstrations on a rancher's place. The demonstrations are geared to the dual purpose much as is illustrated on these pages. At any rate Emerson with Lane and LeViness, is able to get across some of the principles of beef herd improvement. He holds these combination work-study sessions where, by consent, neighbors are allowed to participate. As Emerson points out not all phases of beef herd improvement are not adopted first time around...some ranchers buy the best bulls available; some weigh and grade heifers. This helps them to identify the best heifers to keep as replacement stock.

Gradually they are learning to keep the best while the poorer animals are being shipped to market, he says.

"When you plan a program as is
The calf in upper left picture is being released from the squeeze chute and returned to the breeding herd which in upper right picture is being run back onto the range. In lower left a calf pictured here,” says Emerson, “you invite friends, neighbors, family and relations to help out and possibly join the program.”

And, as with all livestock improvements changes come slowly.

For this particular demonstration Emerson worked with the Wayne Taylor family and relatives. It was their cattle which were worked. Scales and squeeze chute were furnished by Navajo County Fair Commission while eartags and records were provided by the Cooperative Extension Service in Arizona.

Emerson points out that the kind of a calf a heifer produces the first time indicates the kind she will continue to produce. This has been shown to be 85 percent accurate in research. When calf weaning time rolls around pick the necessary replacement calves from the top of the calf crop. These are selected for size, weight and conformation. The selected heifers are then individually identified, weighed and graded by two non-partisan graders. If possible have them regrade the cattle as yearlings. Compute the weight gains for each animal. Average the weight gain for all heifers. This then becomes the basis from which to make selection for herd replacements. Select those with above average gain first.

Records while hard to get started are invaluable in helping the cattleman make management decisions, Emerson concludes.