



## U.S. Beef Cow-calf Producers' Consultation with Veterinarians and Use of Other Sources of Information

Cow-calf producers have many options when it comes to obtaining information related to running the operation; information sources include veterinarians, salespeople, other producers, publications, and the Internet. With tight profit margins in the cow-calf industry, producers need to use the most up-to-date and accurate information in making management decisions. For those with information to share with cow-calf producers—such as local health officials needing to warn producers about a possible disease occurrence or extension veterinarians seeking to share research results—it is helpful to know which information sources producers prefer.

In 2007–08, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) studied beef cow-calf health and management practices in the United States. The Beef 2007–08 study was conducted in 24 States,\* representing 79.6 percent of U.S. operations with beef cows and 87.8 percent of U.S. beef cows. The operations were grouped into 4 herd-size categories: 1 to 49, 50 to 99, 100 to 199, and 200 or more beef cows.

The goals of the Beef 2007–08 study included examining the reasons producers consulted veterinarians and learning about producers' preferred sources of information on general topics, breeding and genetics, and nutrition.

### Veterinarian consultation

In addition to diagnosing and treating health problems, veterinarians can help cow-calf producers with decisions about disease prevention, nutrition, breeding management, and other production practices. About one-half of cow-calf operations (50.8 percent) consulted a veterinarian for any reason during the previous 12 months (table 1). Slightly more than one-third of operations consulted a veterinarian during the previous

12 months for disease diagnosis (36.2 percent of operations) or disease prevention (35.5 percent). Fewer than 1 of 50 operations (1.7 percent) consulted a veterinarian for production or financial analysis.

**Table 1. Percentage of Operations that Consulted a Veterinarian During the Previous 12 Months, by Reason for Consultation and by Herd Size**

Reason	Percent Operations				
	Herd Size (Number of Beef Cows)				
	1-49	50-99	100-199	200 or More	All Operations
Disease diagnosis or treatment	28.6	48.7	60.8	66.7	36.2
Disease prevention	28.4	45.6	58.1	68.5	35.5
Information on nutrition	9.8	16.8	24.1	30.7	13.1
Information on production management practices other than health	6.2	11.4	15.8	20.3	8.5
Production or financial analysis	1.5	1.7	2.1	3.9	1.7
Any of the above	43.2	62.9	76.3	82.2	50.8

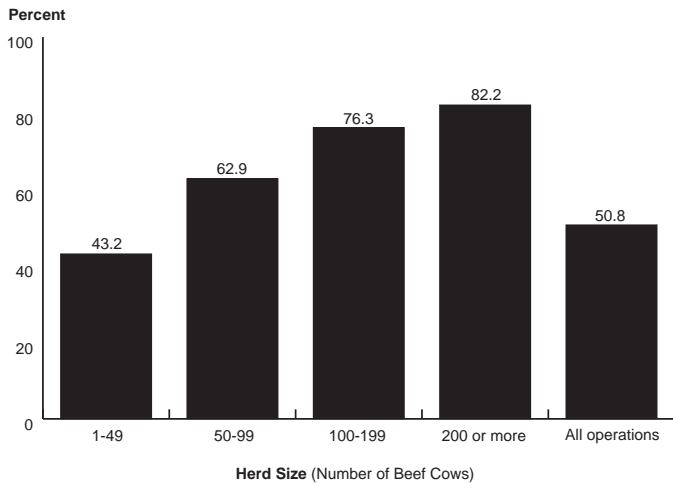
Across herd sizes, more than three-fourths of operations with 100 or more beef cows consulted a veterinarian for any reason during the previous 12 months, a higher percentage than for operations with fewer than 100 cows (figure 1, table 1). Similarly, a higher percentage of operations with 100 or more cows consulted a veterinarian specifically for disease diagnosis or treatment compared with operations with fewer than 100 cows, and the percentage also was higher for operations with 50 to 99 cows than for operations with 1 to 49 cows. The percentage of operations that consulted a veterinarian for disease prevention increased as herd size increased. A higher percentage of operations with 50 or more cows consulted a veterinarian for nutrition

**\* States:**

Alabama, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Wyoming.

information than operations with 1 to 49 cows. The percentage of operations that consulted a veterinarian on production management practices was higher for operations with 100 or more cows than for operations with 1 to 49 cows.

Percentage of Operations that Consulted a Veterinarian for Any Reason During the Previous 12 Months, by Herd Size



### Sources of general information and breeding and genetics information

Producers were asked how important various sources for general information and breeding and genetics information were to running the cow-calf operation. For both types of information, a higher percentage of operations considered veterinarians to be a very important source than any other information source (53.1 percent for general information and 45.2 percent for breeding and genetics information) [tables 2 and 3].

As shown in Table 4, a higher percentage of operations with 100 or more beef cows considered veterinarians and producer/breed associations to be very important information sources than operations with 1 to 49 beef cows. Of all operations, the majority (54.3 percent) considered veterinarians very important sources for either general or breeding and genetics information. The sources for either general or breeding and genetics information considered to be very important by the lowest percentage of operations were consultants (5.1 percent); radio, TV, or newspaper (6.3 percent); and the Internet (7.5 percent).

Table 2. Percentage of Operations by Importance of the Following Sources of General Information to Operating the Cow-calf Operation

Source	Percent Operations			Total
	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important	
Extension service, university, or VoAg instructors	35.8	43.5	20.7	100.0
Veterinarians	15.2	31.7	53.1	100.0
Beef magazines, agricultural journals, or publications	36.5	47.2	16.3	100.0
Producer/breed associations	55.7	31.1	13.2	100.0
Other producers	31.1	45.2	23.7	100.0
Salespersons or company representatives	56.8	31.5	11.7	100.0
Consultants	82.9	12.2	4.9	100.0
Radio, TV, or newspaper	67.9	26.3	5.8	100.0
Internet	73.3	19.8	6.9	100.0

Table 3. Percentage of Operations by Importance of the Following Sources of Breeding and Genetics Information to Operating the Cow-calf Operation

Source	Percent Operations			Total
	Not Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important	
Extension service, university, or VoAg instructors	44.7	38.0	17.3	100.0
Veterinarians	22.5	32.3	45.2	100.0
Beef magazines, agricultural journals, or publications	40.2	44.3	15.5	100.0
Producer/breed associations	55.5	29.3	15.2	100.0
Other producers	33.4	44.2	22.4	100.0
Salespersons or company representatives	59.0	30.0	11.0	100.0
Consultants	83.3	12.5	4.2	100.0
Radio, TV, or newspaper	70.3	24.1	5.6	100.0
Internet	74.3	19.1	6.6	100.0

**Table 4. Percentage of Operations on which the Following Sources for Either General or Breeding and Genetics Information were Very Important to Operating the Cow-calf Operation, by Herd Size**

Source	Percent Operations				
	Herd Size (Number of Beef Cows)				
	1-49	50-99	100-199	200 or More	All Operations
Extension service, university, or VoAg instructors	21.1	26.6	23.6	20.6	22.1
Veterinarians	52.0	57.4	63.7	63.4	54.3
Beef magazines, agricultural journals, or publications	15.6	23.5	21.3	21.6	17.6
Producer/breed associations	13.3	20.4	25.7	23.9	15.9
Other producers	25.3	23.0	25.2	25.8	25.0
Salespersons or company representatives	11.7	14.0	19.1	15.8	12.8
Consultants	4.8	6.0	4.2	6.8	5.1
Radio, TV, or newspaper	6.3	6.7	7.0	4.8	6.3
Internet	7.4	7.5	9.5	7.3	7.5

### Sources of nutrition information

Providing optimal nutrition for the cow-calf herd can help reduce production costs and maximize production efficiency. Operations were asked which sources they considered to be most important for information on animal nutrition. For all operations, about 3 of 10 considered feed salespersons or retailers (31.7 percent) or veterinarians (27.3 percent) to be the most important source of animal nutrition information (table 5). The most important sources for the next highest percentages of operations were other producers (15.0 percent) and extension agents or specialists (11.7 percent).

Across herd sizes, similar percentages of operations considered feed salespersons or veterinarians to be the most important source for nutrition information. Although private nutritionists were the most important source of nutrition information for only 4.0 percent of operations, they were the most important source of nutrition information for a higher percentage of operations with 200 or more cows (15.5 percent) than operations with fewer than 200 cows. (For information from the NAHMS Beef 2007–08 study about nutrition management practices, see “Use of Nutritional Supplements for Cows on U.S. Beef Cow-calf Operations,” NAHMS #560.0510, May 2010; [www.aphis.usda.gov/nahms](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/nahms))

**Table 5. Percentage of Operations by Most Important Source of Animal Nutrition Information, and by Herd Size**

Source*	Percent Operations				
	Herd Size (Number of Beef Cows)				
	1-49	50-99	100-199	200 or More	All Operations
Private nutritionists	2.7	3.7	8.0	15.5	4.0
Feed salespersons or retailers	31.4	33.8	33.4	27.6	31.7
Veterinarians	27.3	28.0	26.3	27.2	27.3
Extension agents or specialists	11.3	14.5	11.9	9.1	11.7
Other producers	16.6	10.7	11.8	10.6	15.0
Producer magazines	3.4	5.1	5.6	4.4	3.9
Other	7.3	4.2	3.0	5.6	6.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

\*Other than producer's personal knowledge or education.

### Trends in use of information sources

In all three NAHMS beef cow-calf studies (conducted between 1992 and 2007), the highest percentage of operations—more than 50 percent—identified veterinarians as a very important source of information for operating the cow-calf operation (table 6). For all study years, about one-fourth of operations considered other producers and extension service or university representatives to be very important sources of information.

In 1992, 34.3 percent of operations reported that beef magazines and agricultural journals were very important sources of information; however, this percentage was lower in 1997 and 2007 (15.4 and 17.6 percent of operations, respectively). The percentage of operations that reported salespersons as a very important source of information decreased from 30.8 percent in 1992 to 12.8 percent in 2007.

**Table 6. Percentage of Operations on which the Following Information Sources were Very Important to Operating the Cow-Calf Operation, 1993–2007**

Source	Percent Operations			
	1992/93 CHAPA <sup>1,2</sup>	Beef '97 Compar- able <sup>2</sup>	Beef '97 <sup>3</sup>	Beef 2007- 08 <sup>4</sup>
Extension service/ university/ Vo-ag instructors	29.2	24.7	24.1	22.1
Veterinarians	56.1	64.1	60.8	54.3
Beef magazines/ agricultural journals	34.3	17.0	15.4	17.6
Producer associations	16.4	11.3	9.8	15.9
Other producers	24.8	22.8	22.7	25.0
Salespersons	30.8	17.0	16.0	12.8
Consultants	6.0	6.5	6.4	5.1
Radio, television, or newspapers	14.8	8.8	8.0	6.3
Internet	NA	NA	NA	7.5

<sup>1</sup>Cow/calf Health and Productivity Audit. CHAPA asked about sources for beef production information. Standard errors were not calculated. Beef '97 asked about sources of information to operate the cow-calf operation. Percentage of operations for very important and extremely important were added together. Beef 2007-08 asked about sources for general information and for breeding and genetics information.

<sup>2</sup>Population: spring calving operations with 5 or more cows in 18 States.

<sup>3</sup>Population: all cow-calf operations in 23 States.

<sup>4</sup>Population: all cow-calf operations in 24 States.

## Summary

Producers considered veterinarians to be the most important source for information on both general topics and breeding genetics. Producers also consider other producers and extension service, university, or Vocational Agriculture instructors to be important sources of general information and breeding and genetics information. Both feed salespersons or retailers and veterinarians were considered to be the most important source of information on animal nutrition. Knowing the sources producers use to learn about various topics can help ensure that vital information is available when and where producers will be most likely to access it.

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