

LIVESTOCK

Google Drive provides producer record keeping, analysis

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As the saying goes, knowledge is power. But it is more than that – knowledge is also time and money. Records provide the knowledge neces-

sary to make informed and objective decisions. This is why accurate, detailed and accessible records are such a vital part of any successful business, including agricultural production.

If you are like me, a difficult part of record keeping is remembering to transfer information that has been collected on paper to a centralized location that is organized and maintained. This information also tends to simply collect dust and never be summarized. Another problem that arises in record keeping is that data may be coming from multiple people. To keep it organized, one person must collect all of the data and enter it into a system. In general, the more times that information changes hands, the more likely it ends up incorrect.

This is where the smartphone comes in. Today's technology allows us to have a computer in our hands at all times. We can use these devices to enter information into documents or spreadsheets that reside in the "cloud," which is, in essence, like a secure



computer hard drive that can be accessed through the Internet from any authorized device. One such service is Google Drive, provided free of charge by Google. To get started, all you need is a Gmail account. Let's examine one way in which a producer might benefit from using Google Drive.

A stocker operator just received a load of cattle that will need to be checked daily and treated for sickness. Depending on the day, either Bob or Kenny may be responsible for these duties. Through Google Drive, both Bob and Kenny have access to

the spreadsheet on which the treatment records are kept. Using this system, a spreadsheet does not have to be emailed back and forth each time a change is made. The spreadsheet that resides on Google Drive is updated in real time. Bob can even be looking at the spreadsheet from his device and see the edits that Kenny is making while he makes them. The same type of scenario could play out during calving season, with feeding schedules, etc.

Another service that works in a similar way is Dropbox. A benefit to ▶

using Google Drive over Dropbox is that Google Drive allows you to set up "Forms," which are essentially questionnaires that you design. These forms are easier to navigate from a small device and automatically format the data into a spreadsheet.

Now that we have the data in one place and it is kept in real time, the data can also be analyzed in real time. The spreadsheet can be set up to perform certain functions on all of the data that is entered. For instance,

if the new load of cattle that was just received is having health problems and you would like to visit about it with your veterinarian, he is likely to ask what the pull rate and death loss is. Answers to these questions can be automatically generated if the spreadsheet was set up correctly and are accessible wherever you have Internet access.

The University of Wyoming Extension and Wyoming Private Grazing Lands Team have developed a series

of four short videos on the use of Google Drive that are very informative and can help you get started. To view the videos, go to youtube.com and search for "smartphone ranch records." Also feel free to contact me if you have questions.

This system is not the answer for everyone. However, this technology has the potential to simplify the record keeping process, expedite the analysis of information and benefit many producers. ■