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S.J. Breiner

S.A. Grau

B.B. Barnhardt

See next page for additional authors

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Computer and internet usage of cow-calf producers is growing

Authors

S.J. Breiner, S.A. Grau, B.B. Barnhardt, A.M. Bryant, Kris Boone, Dale A. Blasi, Ted C. Schroeder, and Ryan M. Breiner

COMPUTER AND INTERNET USAGE OF COW-CALF PRODUCERS IS GROWING

S. J. Breiner, K. M. Boone, D. A. Blasi, S. A. Grau, T. C. Schroeder, B. B. Barnhardt, R. M. Breiner and A. M. Bryant

Introduction

While the world continues to evolve toward enhanced computer and Internet usage, the agricultural arena has been slower to follow. The objective of this survey was to examine the computer utilization practices of cow-calf producers through a nationwide mail survey. By understanding the demographics of today's producers, as well as if and how they are using their personal computers and the Internet, the industry can work toward educating producers about the benefits of this technology.

Experimental Procedures

Surveys were administered to cow-calf producers in the spring of 2006. A panel of experts at Kansas State University completed content validity testing. Participants were selected from a mailing list of cow-calf producers with more than 100 cows. *BEEF®* Magazine provided the mailing list and a random sample of 1,000 producers was selected. Three mailings were sent to each participant over a two-month time period. Non-respondents received a fourth mailing to further encourage response. Mailings included: 1) pre-notice letter, 2) survey packet and cover letter, 3) postcard thank you/reminder, and 4) replacement questionnaire with monetary incentive. Data were collected by Prism Business Media, Inc., and analyzed by both Prism Business Media, Inc. and Kansas State University.

Results and Discussion

A total effective mailing of 972 resulted in 522 completed surveys for an effective response rate of 53.7%. Producers from 41 states were represented in the survey. 77.8% of respondents were over the age of 45 with an average herd size of 160 head.

These data indicate that more than half (54.8%) of respondents noted using a personal computer within their cattle operations (Table 1). This shows some increase from earlier surveys, but still shows a large portion of producers (43.7%) have no personal computer available in their operations.

Table 1: Do You Use a Personal Computer Within Your Cattle Operation?

	Number Reporting	Percent Reporting
Yes	286	54.8%
No	228	43.7%
No answer	8	1.5%

N = 522.

Of those who use a personal computer, 59.1% use it once a day or more. The majority, 80.8%, use a personal computer several times a week or more (Table 2).

Table 2: How Often Do You Use Your Computer?

	Number Reporting	Percent Reporting
Several times a day	84	29.4%
Once a day	62	21.7%
Several times a week	62	21.7%
Several times a month	53	18.5%
Once a month or less	21	7.3%
No answer	4	1.4%

N = 286 – (Computer users only).

In addition, 74.1% of users used their computer for email access, 68.2% for financial management, and 65.4% for maintaining livestock records (Table 3). More than half also cited using their computers for inventory purposes. Machinery and labor records both ranked lower as uses for personal computers.

Table 3: For Which of the Following Activities Do You Use Your Computer?

	Number Reporting	Percent Reporting*
E-mail	212	74.1%
Financial management	195	68.2%
Livestock records	187	65.4%
Inventory	146	51.0%
Machinery records	68	23.8%
Labor records	59	20.6%
Other	38	13.3%
No answer	5	1.7%

N = 286 – (Computer users only).

*Percents may reflect multiple answers.

More than three-quarters of producers reported that their newest computer was less than 3 years old. One-quarter said their newest computer was less than a year old.

Table 4: How Old Is Your Newest Computer?

	Number Reporting	Percent Reporting
Less than 1 year	73	25.5%
1 to 3 years	144	50.3%
4 to 6 years	56	19.6%
More than 7 years	11	3.8%
No answer	2	.7%

N = 286 – (Computer users only).

Of those producers who used a personal computer, 88.5% had Internet access for use within their operations (Table 5). Therefore, we conclude that 48% of the 522 respondents have Internet access available for use in their operations.

Table 5: Do You Have Access to the Internet for Use Within Your Cattle Operation?

	Number Reporting	Percent Reporting
Yes	253	88.5%
No	29	10.1%
No answer	4	1.4%

N = 286 – (Computer users only).

Implications

More than half of cattle producers are using personal computers within their operations, while almost half have Internet capabilities. This shows the growth of this technology in the industry, as well as its potential for future outreach.