

BISON BENCHMARK PROJECT YEAR THREE - Gerard Woynarski Project Consultant

INTRODUCTION

The Saskatchewan Bison Association (SBA) continues to support the need to update bison cost of production and herd performance information to encourage growth and investment in the bison industry. Updated information provides producers an opportunity to compare their bison business performance with the performance of others in the industry and identify areas where they could improve and enhance profitability. Current information is also helpful for financial institutions involved in capitalizing the bison industry.

This report summarizes the results of the third year of the project, provides suggestions as to how the information can be used, how more producers can get involved and outlines next steps.

The SBA acknowledges the continued financial support from Saskatchewan Agriculture. Without their contribution this ongoing project would not be possible.

The SBA also wishes to recognize the Bison Producers of Alberta who have provided resources to enhance producer participation in this benchmark project.

THE PROCESS

Under the continued guidance of an advisory committee an updated plan was established, the data collection format was enhanced, bison producers to provide data were identified, and data was collected through farm visits from January 1, 2013 to May 30, 2013. The data was analyzed and participants had their information compared to data collected. To preserve the confidentiality of individual producer data, the results of at least three producers were required in each data set.

THE RESULTS & DATA COLLECTED

In 2013, the benchmark project experienced a continued growth in participation from bison producers who provided data for the 2011/12 production cycle. In 2012, 115 bison enterprise categories contributed to the benchmark study while in 2013, 130 bison enterprise categories contributed to the study.

Data was collected from 42 enterprises involved in bison cow-calf operations, 48 enterprises were backgrounding operations, and 40 enterprises were finishing operations. The data included herd profile, production costs and investment requirements.

With three years of data now collected, a three-year average of the production costs and performance measures is for comparison purposes.

COW-CALF ENTERPRISES

Herd profile data for the cow-calf enterprise includes items such as: breeding herd size (cows and bulls), breeding herd death loss, culled animals, replacements, calving and weaning dates, number of calves weaned and weights, average calf sale prices and weights, and whether or not a producer pregnancy tests.

KEY PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

Category (No. of Cows)	<100		>100	
	2012	3-Yr Av	2012	3-Yr Av
Number of Farms:	21	16	21	16
Av # of Cows	51	51	255	236
Calving Rate %	88.8	89.0	87.0	86.7
Av Wean Weight – Bulls	484	497	490	492
Av Wean Weight – Heifers	432	445	439	444
Av Days from Birth to Wean	290	291	281	273
Mortality % in Cow Herd	2.38	1.69	2.13	1.81
Av Cash Return Per Cow	\$300	n/a	\$308	n/a
Av Net Return Per Cow	\$152	\$241	\$229	\$328
Av Capital costs per head	\$2935	\$3317	\$1218	\$1414

BACKGROUNDING ENTERPRISES

Herd profile data for the backgrounding enterprise includes: number of acres pastured, number and average weight of backgrounders purchased or retained from own herd, average backgrounder purchase/retained price, days on grass, number of backgrounders sold and retained, average shipping weight, and selling price.

KEY PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

Category (No. of Backgrounders)	Bulls				Heifers			
	<100		>100		<100		>100	
	2012	3-Yr Av	2012	3-Yr. Av	2012	3-Yr Av	2012	3-Yr Av
Number of Farms:	16	11	9	8	17	11	6	6
Av # of Backgrounders	56	63	152	145	60	58	169	150
Av Wt of Purchased & Retained	518	542	443	453	446	456	407	433

Av Shipping Weight (lbs)	808	819	800	741	690	688	778	715
Mortality Rate %	0.31	0.32	0.33	0.35	0.09	0.42	0.64	0.43
Days on Grass &/or Feeders	208	188	224	205	224	197	274	225
Av Daily Gain (lb/day)	1.42	1.51	1.63	1.42	1.15	1.25	1.38	1.25
Av Total Cost per lb Gained	\$1.32	\$1.09	\$1.02	\$1.01	\$1.27	\$1.29	\$1.09	\$1.02
Av Feed Cost per lb Gained	\$0.60	\$0.57	\$0.63	\$0.61	\$0.58	\$0.70	\$0.67	\$0.60
Av Cash Return Per Head	\$228	n/a	\$254	n/a	\$153	n/a	\$211	n/a
Av Net Return Per Head	\$172	\$288	\$211	\$271	\$97	\$204	\$164	\$214
Av Capital Costs Per Head	\$1060	\$827	\$643	\$540	\$1096	\$924	\$575	\$503

FINISHING ENTERPRISES

Herd profile data for the finishing enterprise consists of: number of feeders purchased and placed on feed, average weight of feeders purchased, feeder purchase price, days on feed, number of head sold and retained, average finish/shipping weight at farm, selling price, weight at plant (if available), hot hanging weight, carcass grade, and slaughter age (birth date to slaughter date).

KEY PERFORMANCE MEASURES:

Category (No. of Finishing Animals)	Bulls				Heifers			
	<100		>100		<100		>100	
	2012	3-Yr Av	2012	3-Yr Av	2012	3-Yr Av	2012	2-Yr Av
Number of Farms:	13	10	7	5	14	10	6	6
Av # of Feeders	50	60	243	296	55	56	272	268
Av Shipping Wt at Farm (lbs)	1125	1094	1088	1014	934	918	910	914
Mortality Rate %	0	0.56	0.46	0.65	0.36	0.39	0.05	0.05
Shrinkage %	8.20	6.33	5.94	5.34	7.91	7.40	4.81	5.93
Dressing % at Plant	61.17	61.32	60.43	60.47	61.93	62.47	61.38	61.58
Dressing % Feedlot to Carcass	55.19	57.12	56.63	56.73	56.49	57.41	58.49	57.64
Days on Feed	213	226	186	183	246	236	192	179
Av Daily Gain (lb/day)	1.91	1.89	1.67	1.64	1.25	1.47	1.02	1.24
Av Total Cost per lb Gained	\$1.80	\$1.61	\$1.86	\$1.64	\$2.31	\$1.78	\$2.53	\$2.07
Av Feed Cost per lb Gained	\$0.87	\$0.83	\$1.27	\$1.05	\$1.12	\$0.87	\$1.48	\$1.21
Av Cash Return Per Head	\$344	n/a	\$325	n/a	\$272	n/a	\$272	n/a

Av Net Return Per Head	\$255	\$285	\$267	\$234	\$180	\$199	\$210	\$230
Av Capital Costs Per Head	\$1444	\$1942	\$850	\$787	\$1602	\$2158	\$588	\$568

SYNTHESIS

The performance measures above reflect the averages in each class. The availability of a longer term averages provides an opportunity to compare the most recent year's data for key performance measures. It is interesting to note that in the cow-calf enterprise, the average mortality rate in 2012 was significantly higher than the 3-year average. Also, average net return per cow in 2012 was much lower than the 3-year average net returns, which may be attributable to higher feed costs in 2012.

In the backgrounding enterprises, bulls demonstrated higher average feed cost per pound gained in 2012 and a lower net return per head, compared to the long term averages. Similarly, backgrounding heifer's average net return per head in 2012 was considerably lower than the 3-year average. For the finishing enterprises, 2012 average feed cost per pound gained was higher than the longer term averages. This pattern was also reflected in the average net return per head where 2012 demonstrated lower returns compared to the longer term results. The average daily gain in 2012 for finished heifers was less than the longer term averages, whereas finished bulls showed a better than long term average daily gain for 2012.

As a producer you are able to compare your bison business results to the averages in this report. By doing this you will be able to identify areas where you can improve your operations. For instance, if you have a feeder operation, you can compare your daily gains with the averages. This comparison will give you an indication as to how well you are doing in relative terms. You can compare other variables as well. Be cautious when comparing cost data to ensure that you are comparing costs from the same time periods.

Next Steps

The benchmarking program will continue to become more valuable as more producers participate. To this end, in 2014, the Saskatchewan Bison Association (SBA) will continue to partner with the Bison Producers of Alberta to enhance the benchmark project. We are encouraged that there will be a continued effort to involve more participants in the province of Alberta. In addition, we will be looking for increased participation in Saskatchewan and other provinces. The more producers that contribute to the program, the more reliable the information will become.

Thank you to all those producers who have contributed to the benchmark program over the past three years. We look forward to working with you again in 2014. For those interested in participating in the benchmark program, please contact Gerard Woynarski at 306-536-9841 in Saskatchewan or Pierre Cormier at 780-922-3211 in Alberta.