Beef Quality Assurance

A Guide to Writing Standard Operating Procedures

From the Western Region Alliance on Beef Quality Assurance 2008
### INTRODUCTION

**What Are SOPs**

Standard operating procedures or SOP’s are written guidelines that specifically describe how to complete various tasks on the ranch. They make it possible for different people (employees or family members) to always complete the same tasks consistently and safely. In addition, they make for better future decision-making or investigation into how to improve the processes on the ranch. SOPs should be developed based on fundamental principles of good management.

You may “just know” what needs to be done and the processes needed to achieve success. For example you’ve probably processed cattle many times before and know the idiosyncrasies of your squeeze chute. But not everyone else has this wealth of knowledge. SOPs will provide that bridge of information and serves as a systematic way to make sure that all tasks are carried out consistently.

### WHY SOPs?

Here are 15 Reasons Why SOPs are needed on a ranch operation:

1. A guide for relief workers filling in for vacations, illness or turnover.
2. A reference for employee training, cross-training and retraining.
3. Less chaos and confusion when employees leave.
4. Consistency. A job is performed correctly every time.
5. Approved procedures that reduce the risk of job failures and interruptions.
6. A basis for effective performance evaluation.
7. Improved acceptance of practices because people support what they help create.
8. A means for everyone to think through the whole process of a task.
10. Legal protection since a detailed process is documented in print.
12. An opportunity to build unity around attainable standards and goals with procedures to achieve them.
15. An aid in writing job descriptions and identifying skill requirements (ProDairy 2008).
**SOPs DOCUMENT QUALITY ASSURANCE**

Even if you are BQA-certified and have excellent ranch management practices for Quality Assurance in place, how do you demonstrate that to potential buyers? How do you market cattle in a way that demonstrates that they have been managed using BQA principles? The answer is RECORD-KEEPING, DOCUMENTATION and SOPs for the procedures done on the ranch.

**BASICS OF WRITING SOPs**

An SOP can be a simple set of steps, a tiered set of steps, or a flowchart. The basic elements include an SOP Title, Person Responsible for the SOP, and Date or Revision Date. You should include the list of tools, materials or equipment needed for the procedure and a list of safety precautions for hazardous procedures. The instructions in the process should be simple, short statements and be written clearly and concisely with little room for interpretation. Most often, involving those who are required to comply with the SOP in the SOP development process will improve compliance and may help define the procedure more efficiently.

As you think about which SOP’s you should write first, consider starting with tasks that have safety concerns. You should also address other important tasks that can have the greatest positive impact on your employees and your business — such as when cattle are handled.

**SOPs AND TRAINING**

To attain compliance with what you want accomplished, you need to train those doing the work. Do not assume that everyone can read and understand written SOPs. They should be used as part of the training practice and not replace training. Workers also want to understand why the procedures must be performed correctly. The best steps in training are:

1. Discuss WHAT the procedures are and WHY they are important.

2. SHOW HOW to DO the procedures.

3. Have the trainees DO the procedure and get FEEDBACK.

4. Have the trainees DO the procedure and DESCRIBE WHAT they are doing (SAY AS THEY DO).

**PROCEDURES FOR WHICH YOU MIGHT NEED SOPs AND PROTOCOLS**

- Tagging
- Branding
- Castration
- Dehorning
- Vaccination
- Treatments
- Feeding
- Implanting
- Breeding
- Transporting
- Restraint
- Moving & Handling
- Calving Management

**EXAMPLE SOP**

A good example of where we might need SOPs is in processing calves. There are many procedures and steps to processing calves efficiently and effectively which means that there are many places where errors could occur.

**Processing calves might involve:**

- Restraint  Tagging
- Branding  Dehorning
- Castrating  Vaccination

You might need an SOP for each of these major procedures. Let's use Vaccination as an example. If our goal is to vaccinate every calf effectively (so that they can respond to the vaccine with antibody production) with clostridials and an 8-way vaccine, we can foresee where we might run into problems and have instructions that will minimize error. First, the calves need to be processed in a way that minimizes stress so that their stress response does not interfere with their antibody response to the vaccine. The calves must also be presented to the crew in good condition (good plane of nutrition) so that they can best respond to the vaccine. If those two things are taken care of, you'll need to have the following on your SOP (see example SOP development worksheets):

**Where the work will be done?**
- chuteside or on calf table

**Who will be doing the procedure?**
- Lefty with assistance from Dusty

**A list of equipment or supplies:**
- adequate supply of needles for number of calves and supply of vaccines
- syringes or clean vaccination gun with back-up equipment and adequate amount of vaccine
- cooler and ice packs
- paint stick for marking "done" or herd health forms on which to record
- sharps container for used needles
- garbage container for vaccine bottles and boxes
Personal protective & safety equipment needed
• gloves, boots, hat
End result
• properly handled vaccine given as per label (dose, site) to each calf
Skills or training or certification needed
• review "Top 10 Reasons Vaccines Fail"
• review vaccine labels
• training on how to vaccinate
Steps in the procedure
• obtain vaccine from refrigerator and place in cooler with ice packs; keep cool during entire processing time
• follow label guidelines for vaccine handling
• set up equipment table at chuteside
• load syringe / gun
• give label dose in neck in labeled manner (subcutaneous SubQ or intramuscular IM)
  - for SubQ -- tent skin to make sure needle is under the skin
• mark calf with pink paint stick...or check off on list of calves, mark Tag number on record sheet

Although this seems like an awful lot of work, just going through the process of developing the SOP with the people who will be doing the work will help streamline the work and get buy-in to the way you want the work done.

MAKE THEM VISIBLE

Your completed SOPs should not sit on a shelf. A one-page SOP could be laminated and posted where the procedures take place. A 3X5 index card could be tucked into a pocket for quick reference.

SOPs HELP YOU ENSURE CONSISTENT QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES.
Squeeze Chute Safety Standard Operating Procedures

SOP number ___1____
Written by ___The Processing Team___
Date effective__7/1/2008_________
Last modified__6/15/2008_________

Describes the safety protocol for the hydraulic squeeze chute on the LazyX Ranch

Location: Covered cattle working area.
# of employees: __2______.
Skill level: Only employees trained on squeeze-chute safety may operate the chute. They may require assistance from other. The following employees are qualified: Dusty, Lefty, Seamus.

Equipment and supplies: Chute, movable panels, toolbox, power cord.

Result expected:
- Work cattle through chute quickly, effectively, safely
- Prevent injuries to people and cattle: contusions, cuts, abrasions, and broken bones
- Identify chute malfunctions before using

Protocols:
- Prior to using the chute, establish a communication system to safely coordinate employee actions for loading and unloading livestock into the chute with employee operation of chute hydraulics and mechanics.
- Prior to use, inspect the hydraulic hoses and fittings for defects or leaks and assure they are securely attached at connection points. Examine and test levers, latches, and moveable chute parts to assure they are not damaged and are functioning properly. Tighten loose bolts and nuts.
- If the chute fails the pre-use inspection, notify your supervisor and remove the chute from service by attaching a red tag that states “DO NOT USE.”
- Do not wear loose clothing or jewelry in the vicinity of the squeeze chute. Tie back long hair or wear under cap or hat.
- As necessary, wear boots, gloves, long pants, and eye and head protection when using the chute.
- Keep the work area clean and free of trip hazards.
- Avoid spooking livestock during handling operations.
- Be alert and aware of potential sudden changes in conditions when handling livestock.
- Keep feet, arms, hands, and fingers clear of gates and other moving hydraulic squeeze chute parts

Prepare Feedbunk
1. Sweep feed refusals to end of feedbunk.
2. Scoop feed refusals to TMR mixer.
3. Record weight of feed refusals in notebook.
4. Distribute feed refusals in bunk at calf pen.

Load Mixer
1. Check feeder notebook for amount of ingredients to mix.
2. Add protein concentrate from bin #1 and record.
3. Add ground corn from bin #2 and record.
4. Add haylage from bunker #2 and record.

Mix Feed
1. Mix feed for exactly five (5) minutes.
2. Do NOT move tractor while mixer is running.
3. Record total amount of feed in mixer.

Distribute Feed
1. Distribute feed evenly along entire length of feedbunk.
2. Record time in feeder notebook.
3. Return tractor and mixer to equipment shed and clean plates under scales.

(Adapted from Stup R, Penn State)

Figure 1. Sample “Graphic” SOP Format
BigSteer Feedlot, Feeding the Cattle Effective Date: November 2, 2008

(Adapted from UCANR, University of California)
Examples of Potential Monitors for SOP compliance

One way to check on compliance with your protocols is to develop a way to monitor the processes and end results. Below are just a few examples of monitors you could use.

**For Processing Cattle:**

1. Needle use -- Number of needles used / Number of head processed = 1 needle per 10 head or less?

2. Proper injection site -- mark injection site with paint stick.

3. Proper dose of vaccine — number of head and total cc’s required.

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