

Are Computers Luxury Items?

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The other day a friend told me, "Owning a computer is a luxury!" Let's apply the title question to the ratite industry and ask, "Is a computer a luxury for the ratite rancher?"

Good records are essential for tracking the business health of a ratite ranch. Without up-to-date breeder records, how does one tell which birds are good breeders and which are not? Let's suppose that you have a hen that lays an average of 75 eggs each season. She is a "keeper", right? What if I told you that 54% of her eggs were aborted during incubation and 45% of the hatch were weak and died within one or two weeks of age? Is she still a keeper? Maybe so and maybe not! After all the rooster also influences the hatch statistics—not to mention the incubator, feed, and so on.

The point is that you need a complete picture of your operation as it changes from day to day and you can not afford to spend a great deal of time developing that picture. Numerous factors should be considered when making decisions as shown in the example of the breeder hen. Time is required to define the factors so they can be compared. Some factors are more difficult to get a handle on than others.

This is where computers come in. One can research records stored on a computer much faster than picking through stacks of papers or boxes of manual records. An analysis, that would take you hours by hand to complete, could be completed in a matter of seconds or minutes on a computer. Printed records are available at the click of a button. Often times you have the option of looking at the same data in different ways to highlight different factors.

Time is a valuable asset that is often hard to come by. I have yet to meet a farmer, rancher, or anyone else who thinks that he or she has lots of time to waste. A computerized ratite

tracking program that has up-to-date records will give you fast and accurate information on which to base your business decisions. The computer helps you reduce the amount of time you have to spend in the office doing paperwork. I have heard the comment, "I do not have enough birds, yet, to justify a computer system and ratite tracking program." What better time to learn how to use a computer and program than when the pressure is light? You can take time to become familiar with the system without feeling pressured. You can "take it out for a test drive" and see what happens if you do this or that. The longer you wait to make the change to a computer system the more stressful the change is likely to be.

One last point. In the business world, hardware is considered to be cheap when compared to labor costs. The same concept is true for ranchers. Unless you have hired hands, you may not be paying directly for labor costs. Each of us usually figures our own time is cheap compared to paying someone else to do a job. Even so, your time is limited and that does put a price on your time. The purchase of a computer system is a one-time cost compared to the savings in time that the computer can give you day after day in your business operation, once you get past the learning phase of the computer.

Is a computer a luxury for a ratite rancher? No more so than self-feeders, automated incubators, and the like. Each in its own way helps the rancher be more efficient in using his or her time. A limited amount of time is available in any single day—the successful rancher is the one who uses that time wisely.