

Online Reading: Addressing Misconceptions, Problems

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The Internet can be an amazing tool, providing instant access any time of the day or night to just about anything we need. It also can be extremely frustrating and uncooperative at times.

For members who have logged on to their secured, members-only portions of the North American Limousin Foundation (NALF) Web site (www.nalf.org/members), it can be an equally rewarding and weary experience. Having anytime access to your herd data can be incredibly helpful. But when you are trying to update your herd inventory or register calves online at midnight, you are tired, the process is not going smoothly, and you are getting error messages that only a computer programmer can interpret—it can be maddening.

Here are some tips to help:

1. If you are a first-time user, take time to read, *Online Data Recording: A Beginner's Guide*. It is available on your member site's home page.

2. You must **screen for errors** before you can submit any data to NALF. If you screen for errors, then do anything else, you will have to screen for errors again before submitting. It takes a minute or two to screen for errors because the system has to check the data thoroughly against the herdbook. Be patient, and wait for the process to complete.

3. When submitting performance updates, enter the animals' birth date range first. After you identify the group, enter the individual animals' data. If entering yearling data and an animal does not come up in the birth date range, ask the following questions: (a) Does the animal have weaning data on file at NALF? (b) Is the animal still in your name (or a linked member's name)? If you answer "yes" to both, re-check the birth date range. If you answer "no" to either, submit the data on paper.

4. You must enter dates in the following format: "12/31/06." You must enter the slashes and use the "month/date/year" sequence.

5. Only put a date in the artificial insemination (AI) field if the breeding was

AI. If the breeding was not AI, leave that date field blank.

6. When identifying foundation cows, you must use a **number**. Symbols, punctuation marks and letters are not allowed.

7. If you get an "invalid weaning date" error message, the date you indicated when the measurements were taken is not within the correct age range. Check that you entered the date in the correct format (see No. 4), then check how old the animal was on that date. If it wasn't between 160 to 250 days of age, take a new measurement in the correct age range. If you cannot take a measurement in the correct age range, submit the data on paper and note it was the only measurement available.

8. If you see a field highlighted in red after you screen for errors, scroll down to the bottom of that calf record to see what the error is. If you can fix the error, make your changes and screen for errors again. When there are no more errors, the "submit to NALF" button will become available. After you click "submit to NALF," you still have to "accept" the data to send it. It is a two-step process.

9. One way to save time when entering your data is to increase the number of animals shown on each page or screen. When in your inventory, instead of 25 animals per screen, increase that number to save time paging through them. When looking at errors in the birth data, instead of five animals per page, increase to 25 or more.

10. Use the "find dam now" feature to identify the dam you want and bring her to the top of the screen when entering her calf's data. Use it again to find the next dam.

11. Remember to "save for editing later" or "screen for errors" regularly. Both features **save** your data. Yes, it takes a minute or two, but it is well worth the time if you suffer a power failure or other blip in your connection.

12. Linking memberships is for contemporary grouping. Keep your groups together, enter the data in

groups, then submit. If you submit the animals' data separately, the system will not group them. When entering birth data, enter all the animals you have in one batch, so contemporary groups stay together. Do not enter and submit one, then another, then another. Enter a batch, then submit it.

13. When you think you are ready and you have entered all the data you have, screen for errors. If there are none, click "submit to NALF." You then will see a page that shows all the data you are about to submit in a tidy "printable version." Print it for your records, and take a good look at the data's accuracy. If you see something you have entered incorrectly, decline the submission. Go back into the area where you were entering data and make any necessary changes. Screen for errors again and submit. When you are confident the data is accurate, accept the submission. The data then will be on file as such.

14. If you experience continual problems with "Internal Server Error" messages, contact the NALF office. We can help you change some settings on your computer that should fix the problem.

Always remember that help from a NALF staff member is only a phone call away; and while you will not be able to talk to anyone at midnight, we can log on to your online session with you during business hours and provide assistance. If you are a computer novice, take heart: It does get easier with practice. If you are having a less-than-ideal online recording experience, do not give up. The Electronic Age is here, and together we can work to untangle the World Wide Web. **LW**