

Making your smart phone work for you: apps for the cattleman

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There are an amazing variety of applications better known as apps available for beef producers. A wide range of apps are available on these devices. There are apps for monitoring weather conditions, market conditions, herd management, record keeping, functional app such as flashlights, and even apps that allows for keeping track of employee work hours. In addition to apps, the web browser in smartphones allows producers to connect to websites from anywhere on the farm. Producers even have the ability to connect their phones to records stored on the home computer for easy access in the field. Many mobile apps also have a desktop version which can make data input easier.

Weather apps

Weather apps are extremely popular among farmers and ranchers. A search for “weather” on the iTunes store gives hundreds of choices for weather tracking and radar. In addition to the popular apps that provide localized weather forecasts and current radar, most local news stations also provide apps that give weather and news specific to your area. These apps are invaluable for farmers during hay season, and even when planning cattle working or shipping.

Market apps

Perhaps what some deem the most useful smartphone feature is the market tracking apps. There are numerous options available, but most provide both fat and feeder cattle prices along with grain prices. Beef Market Central provides users with current Chicago Board of Trade futures market reports of live cattle, feeder cattle, energy and crop inputs, and streaming news. Some app content requires registration, and there are several levels of subscription available.

CattleFax also offers a market tracking app. With a brief registration, users are provided up to the minute access to futures markets, news, and market reports from across the country. The app also features built in calculators for retained ownership, breakeven prices, and grid values. Additional features, such as access to CattleFax data and news, is available for paid members.

Drovers Cattle Network also offers an app with many features. This popular magazine and website provides news and weather along with market tracking in one app. In addition, users can get news customized to their region, as well as access to an industry events calendar. The app is very interactive, and user friendly with many features contained in one.

There are even apps available from Stockyards. JRS Mobile (Joplin Regional Stockyard) offers an app for producers. This app offers up to date futures markets tracking for cattle, corn and soybeans, as well as market tracking from the JRS sales on Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday each week. Summaries of the week’s video cattle sales are also available in the app.

Pasture Management

There are several app available to make managing pastures slightly easier for producers. One app, simply named “PastureMap”. This app is designed to make pasture management easier, and improve stocking rates and carrying capacity for producers. Producers can see Google Earth

images of their farm that can then be used to draw individual pastures, and track acreage and fencing perimeter estimates. The app is also designed to allow producers to track herd movement from pasture to pasture. Input of herds and animal weights allows the app to calculate feed requirements and available grazing days. Over time the app can also pull in data on rainfall and soil condition from the NRCS. Photos of each pasture can even be stored to the map. There is a free trial version of the app that may be sufficient for many small producers as it allows tracking of up to 100 animals. There are also 3 other subscription levels available with multiple additional features.

Dow Agrisciences offers a Range and Pasture Solution Finder app. This app allows producers to target specific weeds and determine which products are recommended for control of specific weeds, with a picture guide. The app also allows producers to search by brands, and view literature associated with each chemical. If a solution isn't found on the solution finder or more assistance is needed, producers have the option to contact their local representative.

MSU-ES apps

The Mississippi State University Extension Service has recently entered the world of app development. Currently, there are two apps available from MSU-ES, a Breakeven app, and a Cattle Calculator app.

The Breakeven app offers the ability for producer's to determine the minimum price that must be received for an animal to not lose money based on a beginning weight, gain, cost of gain, and expected sale price. A recently released app offers a directory for producers to find contact information for resources within the Extension service. Currently there are also several other beef cattle related apps in the development or planning stages.

The "Cattle Calculator" app has been wildly popular among cattle producers across the country. It offers basic calculations for reproductive, performance, and management applications. Reproduction-related calculations include expected calving dates based on known breeding dates and breeding dates based on a known calving dates. The app can provide the number of days a cow has been pregnant based on the current date and a breeding date. It includes a breeding season calculator that provides calving and breeding dates based on a set breeding season. The calculator will provide insight into growth and overall performance with an adjusted birth weight based on the mother's age, adjusted weaning weight and adjusted yearling weight; average daily gain; and required gain to reach a certain projected endpoint. Management assistance includes dosage calculations for dewormers and other medicines based on an animal's weight and the manufacturer's recommended dosage. It also provides frame scores and trailer stocking density

The Beef Team also has plans for apps which will allow for comparisons of alternative feeds with common feeds, estrus synchronization planning, and an app version of the popular Beef Cattle Pocket Guide publication.

No matter which smartphone device or app you choose, it is important to remember that there are many options available, likely one to fit most every need. New apps are developed every day. Don't be afraid to try free apps. Many are available in the stores free of charge, and if you don't like them you can always delete them. There is a wealth of information and potential available at your fingertips from these smartphones, be sure to use them to your advantage.

For more information about beef cattle production, contact an office of the Mississippi State University Extension Service, and visit extension.msstate.edu/beef.