



Cattle Producer's Handbook

Management Section

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Livestock Scales Selection for Cattle Ranches

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Livestock scales are an important component of many ranching operations. They are essential for marketing cattle and monitoring livestock performance in the areas of calf growth, cow weight, and cow condition.

Previously, only large cattle operations could justify the purchase of livestock scales, and often these could not be certified to weigh animals for sale. The "Economics of Scales Purchase" section (see page 2) discusses the impact of a shrink and how to reduce the shrink loss in order to pay for ranch scales.

Beam Platform Scales

Beam platform scales (like the old Fairbanks scales) were the standard for many years. Old and new beam platform scales require excavation, a concrete pit, and costly repairs if they become inaccurate. The cost of the excavation and the concrete for the scale pit may total several thousand dollars, depending on the contractor and the cost of the materials.

Before purchasing a set of the old Fairbanks scales, check with your state's Weights and Measures office. Some states allow scales that are licensed at the time of sale to be grandfathered in or relicensed even though they would not qualify for licensing by today's standards.

If the scales were purchased out of state, this may void the old license and make them ineligible to be certified.

Any Fairbanks scales that are older than the "J" series may not meet the certification requirements. For those livestock producers who prefer beam scales, a few companies are still marketing new scales.

Electronic Scales Selection Information

Technology and marketing strategies have stimulated rancher interest in electronic scales. These scales are accurate, inexpensive to purchase, and easy to set up.

A basic electronic scale has four load cells, an indicator, and a platform that rests on the four load cells. The indicator requires 110 volt current to the scale site. Some indicators are solar powered, for scales located too far from an electrical source. The footing needed for the scale will use 5 to 6 yards of concrete.

The components of electronic scales are printer, weight indicator, platform, and the load cells. These components may be manufactured by one company or by several different companies. Before purchase, make certain all components are compatible and that each component will be certifiable in the package you are purchasing. Ensure that the following information about the platform is pertinent: specific model, platform size, and capacity listed. Also determine that the platform accuracy is appropriate, and the platform capacity matches the rest of the scale components.

In selecting an optional printer, ensure the specific model number is approved for the intended use. Usually a printer is required as a part of the scales if used to weigh animals to be sold. A weight indicator must have the specific model as listed on the certificate. If the class is Type III, then III or III L may be used, but if Type III L is used, then only III L may be used in that application. If a load cell is rated as single, then it may be used as a single or as a multiple cell. If the load cell is rated as a multiple, then it may be used only in a multiple cell application.