

SORTING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

A producer resource guide to help your operation adapt to a changing market and world.



These days it seems like term “sustainability” is on everyone’s mind, in all the headlines, and is front and center in consumer marketing efforts.

It’s no wonder this is the case. Historic drought continues to challenge people who live and work in the western U.S., and the global coronavirus pandemic has left many Americans wondering whether fragile supply chains are built to last and create economic opportunity, rather than risk.

These and many other converging factors mean that beef retailers, marketers and, ultimately, every link of the beef supply chain outside the ranch gate is looking at ways to proactively address these demands.

At the same time, producers recognize that they owe it to tomorrow’s world and future generations of producers to improve beef’s footprint as much as possible today – and that means it’s time to ramp up sustainability efforts.

But what does sustainability mean for beef production, specifically? And how can U.S. beef producers put it into practice and take the next step on their sustainability journey?

BUZZWORDS DE-CODED

Sustainable beef production is an economically viable, environmentally sound and socially responsible beef production system that prioritizes planet, people, animals and progress.

UNDERSTANDING THE BASICS OF SUSTAINABILITY

But how does all that translate to ranch-level production and management? There are five key pillars to a sustainable beef operation. Your operation might already have a handle on many of them today. Yet as you look toward the future, it’s important to understand ways your operation can continue to improve.

Strengthening your operation’s performance across five key pillars will help protect natural resources and ensure your operation is ready for a changing world and a changing market:

- 1. Grazing**
- 2. Profitability and Efficiencies**
- 3. Herd Health**
- 4. Transition Planning**
- 5. Worker Safety and Wellbeing**

Click on one of the above subjects to jump to that chapter, or simply keep scrolling to learn valuable insights about how your operation can adapt to a changing world and changing market.

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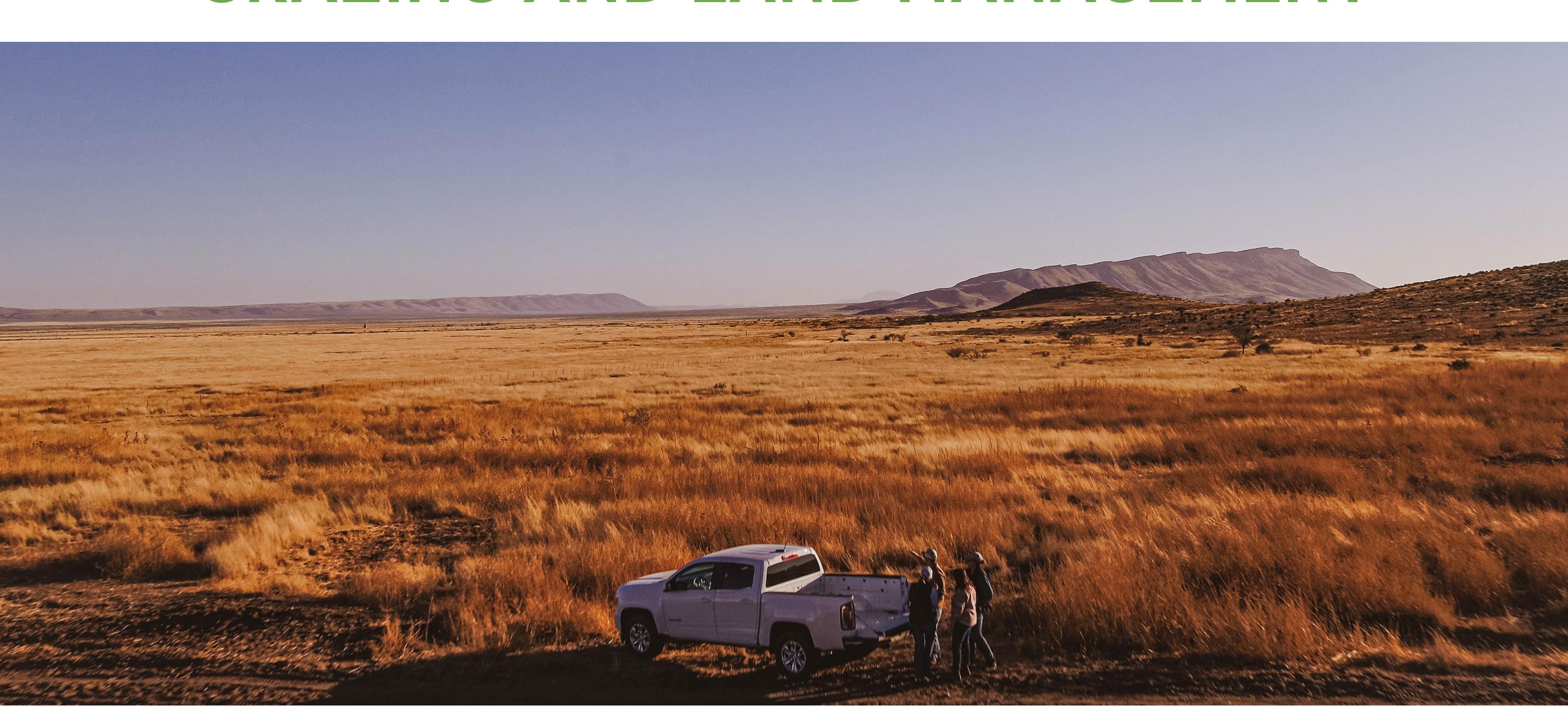
LEARNING MODULES

[Click here](#) – to access in-depth learning modules to help you better understand the concepts covered in this guide and apply them to your own operation (the modules are free, just log-in one time)

SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL

[Click here](#) – to take a 5-minute assessment that can show you ways you could improve your operation

GRAZING AND LAND MANAGEMENT



As a beef producer or rancher, you are a steward of the land. You're tasked with taking care of not only livestock but also the forage species, soil, water, air and wildlife that are an integral part of your operation. Grazing management helps optimize land and water resources.

Many locally specific factors play a role in making your grazing management plan a success. These can include soil type, climate, vegetative cover, wildlife and wildlife habitat, soil function, cattle health and performance requirements, and invasive species.

- [Click here](#) — to access USRSB's toolkit on grazing and land mgmt
- [Click here](#) — for an interactive learning module on this topic

Proper grazing and land management have many sustainability benefits. For example, they can:

- Reduce the amount of water required to maintain plant life, making drought easier to withstand
- Maximize and extend the growing phases of plant life, reducing the burden of seasonal forage availability
- Increase the diversity of beneficial plant species in pasture, promoting good growth and herd health
- Improve water infiltration through the soil, which can slow runoff, reduce erosion and recharge the water table
- Protect streams, stock tanks and springs, improving water quality both on-ranch and downstream

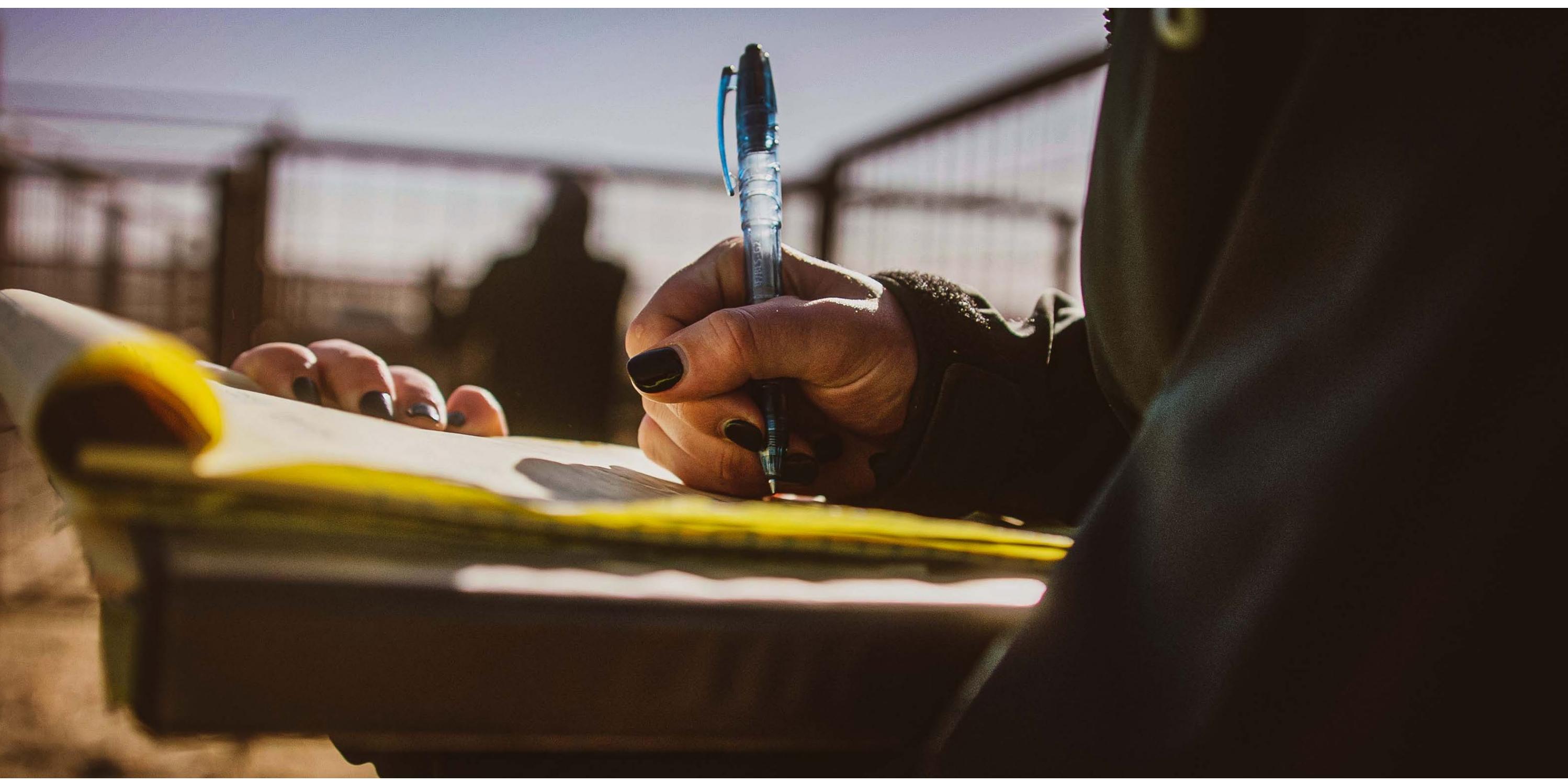
PRODUCER ACTION

- Put in place a written grazing management plan that includes detailed instructions; if you already have such a plan, explore how you might update it, improve it or expand it
- Ensure all team members who make up your operation understand the plan and are trained to implement it
- Build out a system for measuring your progress in implementing the plan, and make changes where needed

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Click here](#) — for state-specific grazing management plan resources, which can be accessed here
- [Click here](#) — to learn about 7 things you can do to get started today
- [Click here](#) — to read about 10 misconceptions about grazing management planning
- [Click here](#) — for details on the fundamentals of any grazing management plan from Colorado State Extension

PROFITABILITY AND EFFICIENCY



A central component of sustainability in any business – especially agricultural businesses – is profitability and efficiency. A profitable operation not only sustains itself but invests in improvements or additions to the operation and its staff. An efficient operation minimizes inputs. It does as much as it can with as little as possible while sustaining the natural resources the operation relies on.

Improving the profitability and efficiency of a beef operation involves optimizing every facet of the operation. This includes maximizing efficiency of the animals converting inputs (such as forages and grains) into a high-quality and high-yielding carcass, improving reproductive efficiencies, and minimizing waste (in categories such as resources, time and capital).

- [Click here](#) – to access USRSB's toolkit on profitability and efficiency
- [Click here](#) – for an interactive learning module on this topic

Profitability and efficiency are primarily driven by four management factors that contribute heavily to sustainability:

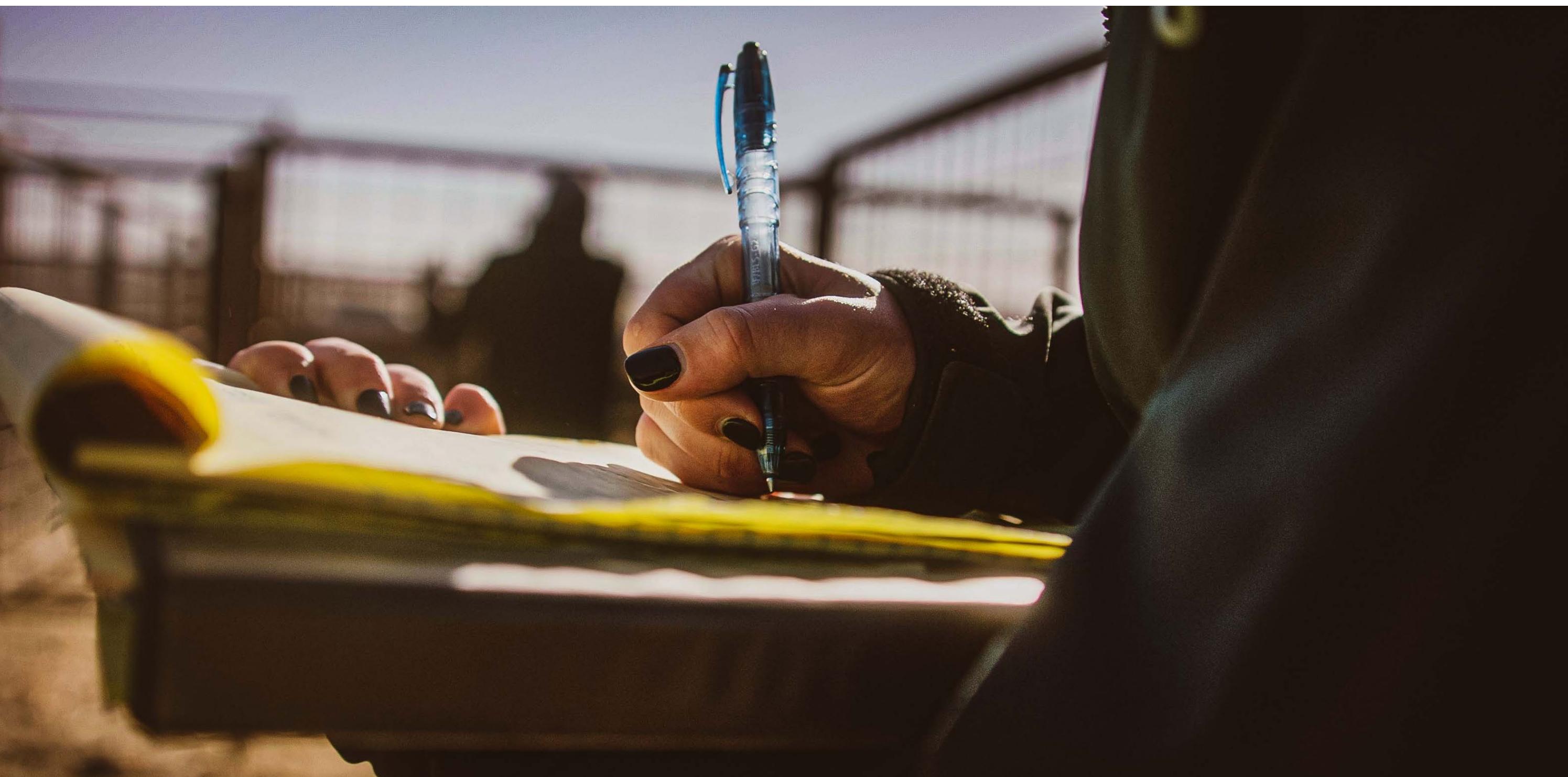
1.) Financial and business management

Good financial management means having a detailed understanding and way to track your operation's net worth, cash flows, operating costs, liquidity, solvency, breakeven point, debt, taxes and more. This component can be overwhelming, but is a cornerstone of any sustainable operation.

PRODUCER ACTION + RESOURCES

- Use financial tools developed specifically for cattle producers to assess your operation's finances and identify opportunities for improvement:
- [Click here](#) – for a ranch finance scorecard from the University of Minnesota
- [Click here](#) – for ready-to-use financial management spreadsheets from Purdue University designed specifically for farm and ranches
- [Click here](#) – for a beef cow breakeven calculator from CattleFax

PROFITABILITY AND EFFICIENCY



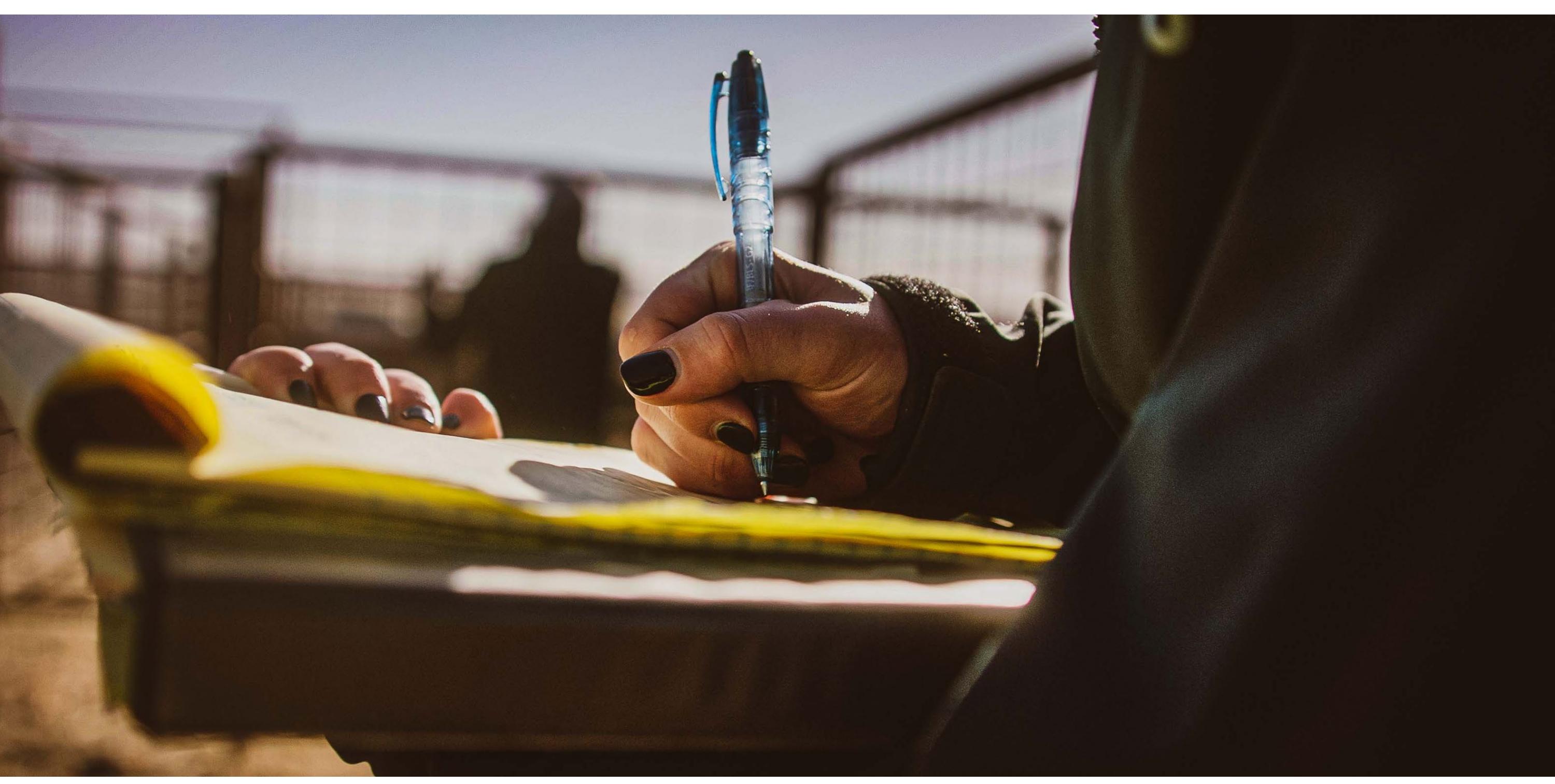
2.) Nutrition management

To optimize annual per-animal production costs, proper nutrition management is a must. An animal's lifetime performance, both in terms of carcass and breeding outcomes, is built on this principle.

PRODUCER ACTION + RESOURCES

- Build a supplemental nutrition plan and track its effects on herd health, body condition and cost per animal
- Ensure the plan includes unique provisions for all stages of an animal's life, with special consideration for breeding, pregnancy and early calfhood
- Update and adapt this plan as needed, and ensure it is flexible, allowing for changes in forage resulting from weather variability
- Audit your annual nutrition plan to ensure the proper balance of micro- and macronutrients for good growth, fertility and health.
- [**Click here**](#) – to use the Basic Balancer spreadsheet from the University of Georgia to help you ensure the right ration mix
- Understand beef cattle body condition scoring, learn how to measure it and consider ways to adapt your nutrition plan in real time as pasture and weather conditions change.
- [**Click here**](#) – to access a body condition scoring tool from the University of Missouri

PROFITABILITY AND EFFICIENCY



3.) Reproduction management

For cow-calf producers, tightly managing herd reproductive performance is a critical component of profitability and efficiency. It influences the total number (or pounds) of animals marketed in a given year. It also affects calving season length and timing, which can affect market access, timing of available forage and total herd nutrition needs.

PRODUCER ACTION + RESOURCES

- [Click here](#) — to build a reproductive management plan that fits your operation using this guide from the University of Georgia
- [Click here](#) — to determine if estrus synchronization and artificial insemination are right for your operation using this guide from the Beef Reproduction Task Force

4.) Genetic management

Optimizing genetic selection in a way that works for your operation's marketing plan and environmental constraints is central to improving profitability and efficiency. Good genetic selection will allow your operation to prioritize the traits you need to while balancing the rest.

PRODUCER ACTION + RESOURCES

- Write down a genetic improvement plan for your herd with your operation's strategic objectives in mind.
- [Click here](#) — for an example strategy for the state of Texas, developed by AgriLife Extension. (Note: Although this document is designed for beef operations in Texas, its components are broadly relevant as a foundation for producers in any state.)
- Meet with a territory representative of the breed association for the type of herd bulls you typically use. Together, identify ways you can improve your selection process; local university Extension agents can also help
- [Click here](#) — to access tools and resources from the American Angus Association to help you better understand Expected Progeny Differences (EPDs). (Note: These resources are specific to Angus, though much of the information is relevant across breeds. Other breed associations provide similar resources for your reference.)
- [Click here](#) — to access a set of free breeding and genetic selection tools that can help you make genetic decisions

HERD HEALTH AND ANIMAL WELLNESS



Ranchers have a moral and ethical responsibility to ensure the health and well-being of livestock in their care. This critical component of sustainability involves preventing illness, mortality and unnecessary suffering. It also greatly benefits your operation's bottom line.

Maintaining good herd health improves sustainability because it:

- Reduces animal injury, illness and mortality, increasing overall operation profitability while enabling good market access and minimizing unnecessary animal suffering and loss
- Minimizes likelihood of contributing to foodborne illness or antimicrobial-resistant organism outbreaks, building a healthier world for animals and people

PRODUCER ACTION

- Develop a disease and parasite prevention plan alongside the recommendations of your veterinarian; ensure that the plan is written down and that a Veterinary-Client-Patient-Relationship (VCPR) Agreement is signed by both parties ([Click Here](#) to see an example agreement)
- Ensure all your operation's employees are certified through the Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) program, which can be done online or in person. (Note: You can [Click Here](#) get started.)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Click here](#) — to access free resource guides from the Beef Quality Assurance program
- [Click here](#) — to access a toolkit on herd health and animal wellness from the U.S. Roundtable for Sustainable Beef
- [Click here](#) — for an interactive learning module on this topic

TRANSITION AND SUCCESSION PLANNING



Every operation needs a roadmap for the next generation (whether family or not) to maintain management of an operation. Establishing these plans requires an investment of time and will positively impact your family, future and bottom line.

Transition and succession planning is central to the beef sector's ability to maintain open spaces, natural habitats, and thriving ecosystems, all while contributing to a financially healthy business that benefits many and feeds the nation. With a transition and succession plan in place – ranchers can rest assured the stewardship they have committed their lives to remains intact and doesn't become some kind of urban development.

PRODUCER ACTION

- Begin meeting with family members and other key stakeholders in your operation to discuss what the ideal future for your business looks like
- Meet with trusted advisers to develop a detailed transition plan

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Click here](#) – for a set of planning resources designed specifically for working ranches from American Farmland Trust
- [Click here](#) – to access a toolkit on transition and succession planning from the U.S. Roundtable for Sustainable Beef
- [Click here](#) – for an interactive learning module on this topic

WORKER SAFETY AND WELL-BEING



The welfare of the people who work to make cattle operations successful is central to sustainability in beef production. This includes everyone who handles cattle in any capacity. It also extends to those who transport animals and any youth who might spend time working on the ranch. Prioritizing the safety and well-being of the people who steward the animals and the land ensures their ability to do their jobs well.

PRODUCER ACTION

- Ensure everyone who handles animals has undergone proper stockmanship training, such as that provided through the Beef Quality Assurance program ([Click Here](#) to access) and perform regular evaluations to identify areas of improvement for each employee
- Develop a written safety policy for the operation and identify areas of improvement for each worker
- Provide specialized training, guidance and supervision to any youth working on the ranch to ensure they are equipped with everything they need to remain safe; also, be sure that protocols from the [Fair Labor Standards Act Youth Employment Code](#) are followed

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Click here](#) — to access a toolkit on employee safety and well-being from the U.S. Roundtable for Sustainable Beef
- [Click here](#) — to access Beef Quality Assurance program resources on the topic
- [Click here](#) — for an interactive learning module on this topic

BUILDING A BETTER BEEF SYSTEM



There's no question the market and the world are changing.

Today's consumers want food that aligns with their environmental, social and personal health values.

Tomorrow's planet demands beef operations that are more efficient and environmentally conscious.

And just like they have for hundreds of years, American beef producers are listening.



Trust In Beef is a new effort to empower beef producers on their continuous improvement journey while connecting consumers to the real-life stories behind American beef - the most sustainable beef production system in the world.

We translate the rapidly evolving needs of a changing market into the no-nonsense information that American ranchers need to make decisions about the future of their operations.

As we help beef operations ramp up their continuous improvement efforts, we capture these stories and connect consumers to the wave of progress building across American ranches. This builds trust - in beef and in America's beef producers.

Trust In Beef is led by Farm Journal's sustainability and regenerative ag division, Trust In Food, alongside its iconic beef brand, Drovers, which has served beef producers with the information and news they need to thrive for nearly 150 years.

Check out our online resource hub for more information on what sustainability means for the future of your operation at www.drovers.com/topics/trust-beef

Have questions or comments for us? Send us an email!
trustinfo@farmjournal.com

**EMPOWERING producers on their sustainability journey
CONNECTING consumers to beef's sustainability story
ACCELERATING the industry's efforts**

Production of this resource guide was made possible through the generous support of the members of the Trust In Beef Founding Partners Council: The U.S. Roundtable for Sustainable Beef, the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, and Merck Animal Health.

Learn more here: www.drovers.com/topics/trust-beef