

The wind driven wild fires that raged across portions of Kansas on December 15th caused many people to lose parts of their operations and some to lose everything. As with most things, there is something we can learn in retrospect and that is the importance of secure and complete record keeping. This lesson is not just important for ag producers or business owners but is important for everyone. Almost all government and insurance programs are going to require an accurate, up to date inventory of what you had and what you lost before they will pay anything.

The first question to consider is how accurate and up to date are your records? It's important to have a full inventory of everything you own and keep that up to date as you add, remove or replace items. For equipment and household goods that might mean recording things like year, make, model, serial numbers, purchase price, etc. I would also suggest including dates of purchase on that inventory because many things depreciate over time. For livestock, feed and grain it can be a bit harder. For livestock, it can be complicated. Everyone probably has a list of ear tag numbers and where each animal is located but in the event of a loss, do you have verification that these animals actually exist? One potential means I can think of for verification are records from your veterinarian. Things like vaccination records, preg check records and semen test records can be a good third party verification of what animals you have. Combining those records with sales receipts can help give you a real time inventory should something happen. For feed, it's important to know what and how much you have. For example, if you purchase hay get a receipt for how many tons you purchased is better than getting one for number of bales unless you can combine that with scale tickets showing actually bale weight. If you store your feed in multiple locations, it's important to know how much you have stored at each place. For stored grain, it's important to have scale tickets and records of every load in and out of your bins to prove what you had in there. Knowing bin capacity and guessing at how full it is or was is not an accurate inventory. Another useful tool for inventory is a camera because seeing is often believing.

The second question to consider is how secure are your records? By secure I don't necessarily mean from theft but from other loss or damage. This is another lesson learned from the fires because people that lost their homes to fire often lost all their hard copy records too. Most people don't think about it for business records but a fire proof box for storing your hard copies in might be a worthwhile investment if a disaster strikes your home or business. Another good option is Cloud storage because the information is stored in an offsite location and will not be damaged in a localized disaster. There are many options for free or low cost Cloud storage that you probably already have access to and haven't considered yet. Keep in mind that Cloud storage is not 100% fool proof, there can be data corruption and sometimes complete loss. The best way to secure your records from loss or damage is to have multiple copies in multiple places, a kind of "don't keep all your eggs in one basket" approach.

In the event of loss from a disaster, make sure to take the time to document the losses that you have sustained before you begin cleaning up. In events like these, it's hard to step back and see just how much devastation that you have but you need to have accurate records of what you have actually lost. Again date stamped photographs and third party verifications make for stronger records.

I hope that nobody reading this experiences a disaster that makes these record keeping tips necessary but if you do and follow these tips, I'm sure it will reduce some of the headaches while recovering from them.