

Source- and Age-verified Replacements Are Hard to Find

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The search is on, but one might say, So what? The search is for heifers that are verifiable for source and age. There is always a need and one would say there is always a sale ready to be made, but the reality of finding heifers in the spring that are source- and age-verified is difficult.

Through the years, the Dickinson Research Extension Center has gone searching for heifers. Heifer shopping in the fall is not very difficult. Generally, a set or two of heifers are found that qualify for the center's needs. The heifers have a documented birth date and source to qualify to fit the center's needs.

The options in the spring, especially as cattle have been or soon will be turned out to grass, are limited. There are heifers available for sale, but the vast majority of the heifers simply no longer carry with them any source or age verification.

Historically, heifers have not been tracked back to the place of origin. In recent months, the news has been that efforts to track a cow back to its "roots" is very difficult. Just the same, the center continues to look and eventually a set emerges.

Times haven't changed. Tracking, traceback or even simpler terms, such as monitoring, are still scarce in the industry. A recent weekly agricultural publication had 51 bull classified ads, but only 11 heifer, cow or cow/calf pair classified ads. Granted, space is limited in a classified ad, but nine of the bull classified ads actually listed performance numbers. The majority of the bull ads referenced performance or at least linked the thought of performance by listing pedigree or relevant ancestral data.

The heifer and cow ads are quite different. Generally, one can determine that cows or heifers are being sold, but after that there is a sharp decline in any kind of relevant data. The typical cow classified ad will utilize a selection of words, such as cow, calf, black, red,

stock, short term, solid mouth, disposition, good, maternal, satisfied, baldie, pair, heifer, worked and ready, in some kind of sentence. There will be an assortment of breed and age designations. One ad did reference home-raised, but no other records were noted.

The bottom line is ambiguity. There is not much to go on for future tracebacks. Granted, many producers simply raise their own replacements, so the issue really never comes up. For those select times when the market door is opened and a need established, disappointment rather than excitement seems to be the trend.

This is not to say the cattle offered for sale are bad, but the overall lack of information and verification is stark. An investment of significant dollars into cows or heifers that have no data is puzzling. The auction is heated. The pairs are selling well. Heifers are moving out of the gate at a good clip. The auction words are the same: cow, calf, black, red, stock, short term, solid mouth, disposition, good, maternal, satisfied, baldie, pair, heifer, worked and ready, and ready to go to work.

The search will continue and the center eventually will find some heifers. In a world of source and age verification, the concept is still a fleeting thought as volumes of cows and heifers find new pastures each spring.

For the new calves, a shiny new tag still is waiting. For the cows and heifers, the tag is probably new and, just like a pair of earrings, simply changed to match the new surroundings.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at www.BeefTalk.com. For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to www.CHAPS2000.com on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0302.

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Designer Heifer and Cow ads -

Pick your words: cow, calf,
black, red, stock, short term,
solid, mouth, disposition, good,
maternal, satisfied, baldies,
pair, heifer, worked, ready.
