

Source and Age Verification Are Two Different Concepts

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Source and age verification are becoming a product of the marketing environment. The entrance into the marketplace is an indication of recognition by those buying cattle that a need exists for source- and age-verified calves. This is good.

The premise of a free market suggests supply and demand drive the marketplace and determine the value of the product. In this case, the demand side is starting to perk up as indicated by marketing organizations soliciting and labeling calves as source and age verified. The supply side is stepping up to the challenge. Source- and age-verified calves are starting to sell. What does that claim mean?

First of all, source and age verification are two different issues. The market, through USDA Agricultural Marketing Service export verification programs, has specific requirements for age. Source is a different question and tends to be more of a requirement for the National Animal Identification traceback efforts under the USDA Animal and Plant Inspection Service.

Age and source verification often are tied together for practical reasons, so the recordkeeping processes can be perfected and the individual calf record will meet the requirements for both age and source.

To help answer that question and put the marketing aspects of what this means into perspective, one must read and review USDA Agricultural Marketing Service information at www.ams.usda.gov/lsg/arc/evjapan.htm. In this country, the USDA establishes and verifies processes that ultimately produce source- and age-verified calves.

James Riva, branch chief of the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service, recently sent a note to those organizations that have a process-verified program (PVP) or a quality systems assessment (QSA) under the USDA Agricultural Marketing Service. The full text is at www.ams.usda.gov/lsg/arc/RequirementforProductionRecords.pdf.

The first and most important point made by Riva is “verification activities for age requirements must be conducted at the slaughter, feedlot and producer levels as required by the submitted QSA Program.” This applies to

QSA and PVP programs.

Two very important concepts need to be noted. QSA and PVP define the process, not the USDA. Producers need to understand and know what is in a particular program and not take anything for granted.

The other important point is that the process must be active from birth through slaughter. To go part of the way is never good enough. Calves need to be followed from the producer through the feedlot and ultimately through the packer. The USDA Agricultural Marketing Service does set basic points within the process.

In terms of calves identified and sold as individually verified for age and source, all calves must bear a unique, individual identification, according to Riva. In addition, it is the responsibility of the calf owner to have adequate records maintained at the ranch to substantiate the age- and source- verification claim.

These records must indicate the actual date of birth of each calf. The record must be available and accompany the calves through the feedlot and packer. If a producer opts for a group process, Riva notes that all animals within a group and born during the same birthing season must be individually identified and bear records that indicate the actual date of birth of the first calf of the birthing season.

All claims must be documented by actual recorded calving data, not by historical production or management practices. Calves cannot overlap into later calving groups or carry over years. Every calf must be within each defined calving season and be identified, traceable and controlled to that calving season.

Cow-calf producers need to keep all the data on calves sold as age and source verified for a minimum of three years. Are you up to the challenge? More later.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at www.Beef-Talk.com. For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1041 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to www.CHAPS2000.com on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0317.

Commingled Multiple Groups of Age Verified Cattle

Individual group birthdays

All cattle within each group must have the unique group identification. Cattle are traceable to the farm of birth.

All groups with same age

Oldest age of all the groups must be used. All cattle within the group must have the unique group identification. Cattle are traceable to a group of farms, one of which they came from.

USDA Agricultural Marketing Service
www.ams.usda.gov/lsg/arc/arcQA.htm