



BeefTalk: The Tag Takes a Team

It takes a team and everyone on that team must be on the same page.

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News of an animal identification system seems to be slowly, but methodically, percolating through the news again. News is ongoing and quite competitive in a strange way, so getting some space is always significant.

In fact, Steve Holcomb of Pardalis Inc. recently noted, “Food safety is front and center on the public's agenda. The chatter is back in the beef industry that mandatory animal ID ‘is coming’ The whole atmosphere has significantly changed from two years ago.”

Some strong thoughts and, I am sure, some strong reactions will be coming. However, as cattle producers, we cannot argue with change. We can only do our best to steer change. So what do we do? A good question and challenge for a time that already is overcome by challenges.

The other day, the Dickinson Research Extension Center purchased some replacement heifers. Interestingly, the search for age and sourced heifers is not easy. Finding a set of heifers that meet all the requirements takes time because the vast majority of the heifer lots are presorted, commingled heifers.

The heifers are good and the management is good, but there is no age and source verification. The data simply is missing, but, as producers, we know the packages are great. Perhaps that is the crux of the discussion.

As Holcomb has pointed out in previous discussions, as an industry we have and continue to fail to connect the value of data with the value of the product. The tag is the connection, so without the connection, the tag obviously has no value and the opportunity for enhancement through “connective marketing” is zero. It comes down to value, enhanced value and some sharing of that value among the players.

The center finally did locate and purchase some replacement heifers. During the sale, the steers from the same operation sold prior to the heifers in age and sourced lots. The sale went along quite well.

Paraphrasing the local livestock exchange, “In this sale, we were finally able to get a true test of the value of source and age verification. The load lots of eight and nine weight steers were age and sourced verified and electronic identification tagged. They sold extremely well and age and source verification had a lot to do with it.”

The exchange went on to say, “For those who are contemplating age and source verification, you need to understand that signing calves up and tagging them does not make this happen by itself. The cattle need to be top-quality, uniform and in good condition (clean and green). If you age and source verify, but don't have things in order, you will be sorely disappointed.”

These comments from the local livestock exchange are a very true assessment and a very progressive

Images



statement summarizing the sale. Did those who purchased the age and sourced lots pay more and did the producers who sold the heifers take home more cash? Well, two truckload lots of very nice black steers weighing in at 840 pounds topped at \$96. A very nice sister set of black heifers at 784 pounds hit \$97. These lots and the other aged and source verified lots were not that difficult to pick out of the sale summaries. They brought more dollars. Enough said.

The results were there, but as I stated at the start of this article, times of change are again knocking at our door. We can build barricades or we can adapt, but both take work and dollars. Neither is simple.

Mistakes will be made, dollars lost and dollars earned. We will backtrack and move ahead since we must move ahead if, as an industry, we are to stay ahead of those who think they know more than we do. Is mandatory identification the answer? No. Is doing what we want to do the answer? No. It takes a team and everyone on that team must be on the same page. It must be flexible enough to respond to change and responsive enough to keep this industry what it is.

In closing, the tag gives us the most headaches because the tag is the source of all the data. The data is our best friend and our worst enemy. However, as was reported at the recent cattle sale, if you don't have these things in order first, you will be sorely disappointed.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at <http://www.BeefTalk.com>.

For more information, contact the NDBCIA Office, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to <http://www.CHAPS2000.com> on the Internet.

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Attachments



PDF - Sale Summaries
(bt041609.pdf - 15.84 Kb)



EPS - Sale Summaries
(bt041609.eps - 203.25 Kb)