

## **BeefTalk 481: With Every Ear Tag, There Should Be a Cow Attached**

*The utilization and incorporation of animal identification within a herd is best left as an individual decision.*

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At a recent meeting, the only item on the agenda was to determine what to print on next year's ear tags. What made the meeting exciting were the new tags the printing was going on.

Animal identification is not new. North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association members have been tagging (identifying) cattle since 1963. The Dickinson Research Extension Center has been conducting research on cattle tags for nearly a decade.

In reality, animal identification has been around since animals were domesticated and will continue as long as we own animals. As soon as the new family dog arrives at home, the discussion turns to naming the new pet, along with the purchase of a collar and tags.

In the beef industry, some will say that every tag should have a cow attached. However, not everyone will agree. In fact, some producers actually get a little irritated.

It is important to remember that the focus of the current public discussion is how animal identification is used, not in how animals are identified. Those are two separate issues.

The utilization and incorporation of animal identification within a herd is best left as an individual decision. In reality, there are many uses and reasons why ear tags are placed in cattle.

The ear tag is overlooked in the tool chest of cattle supplies. However, the ear tag is a critical component of a cattle operation. Tags are utilized for many routine management processes involving ranches and feedlots.

That is one of the reasons it is very difficult to keep tags on cattle. The ear runs out of room and something needs to go.

Watching from the fence the other day, I could see two larger tags that were very evident as the cows were walking past. Both tags had the cow's identification number.

After a closer look, the cow also had a steel clinch brucellosis vaccination tag, DNA tag, steel clinch ranch identification tag and a low-frequency RFID tag.

One could argue the cow was excessively identified. Perhaps that is the real root of the problem. There is a lack of any coordination or recommendations about the many competing branches within cattle systems. As cattle are monitored in one system, the movement of the same cattle to another system generally means starting over.

Plus, many ranches color code groups of cattle on a temporary basis and will place a plain, colored tag in the ear to ease tracking chute side. Tags of this nature allow for location monitoring of the cow simply by checking for colored tags in a pasture or pen.

Tags also are used to pair a cow and a calf by placing a tag on the calf that fits the ranch's tagging system at calving. Issues involving lost or miss-mothered calves can be resolved on the spot.

Ranchers who employ temporary help often have a simple system of color tags to keep cattle straight and reduce communication issues. The green tags going to pen four is a lot easier done than a list of numbers that need to be read.

It does not take long to realize that most livestock operations would struggle without a means to suitably identify individual animals. Plus, tags serve as a mechanism to control external parasites as well.

Future products that a tag may carry are unknown. The bottom line is that tags will be part of the livestock system and the importance of the tags will be paramount.

As was noted earlier, the meeting was held and we decided to go with a paired numbering of a five-digit number on the two tags. However, the numbering is not what makes this new tag exciting. More on that later.

In the meantime, a student asked me what I mean when I say, "May you find all your ear tags." I simply said that he would know once he understands.

May you find all your ear tags.

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

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