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## BeefTalk: Age and Source Verification Can Work

### Age and source verification places value on the calf and its accompanying data.

By Kris Ringwall, Beef Specialist

NDSU Extension Service

A decade has passed since the Dickinson Research Extension Center summarized a calf-tagging program to improve market traceability.

The data, when revisited, tells an old story. From 2004 to 2006, a total of 14,432 calves were tagged individually and followed. Data showed 19.5 percent remained on the ranch or farm of birth as replacement cattle.

Of the calves sold, 13 percent were traced to backgrounding lots (lots designed for slower growth prior to a full finishing program), 29.3 percent were traced to feedlots for finishing and 27.5 percent were traced to the point of harvest. Additionally, 10.3 percent were unable to be traced and effectively lost.

The bottom line: Despite the enthusiasm and desire for cow-calf producers to provide not only the calf but also the corresponding data as a marketable package, only one in four calves arrived at harvest with the data package. Only 25 percent of the calves at harvest were eligible for markets requiring age and source verification.

In addition, costs were documented for the center's project focusing on animal identification, realizing that other management procedures could be done when the tag was applied. Costs were not allocated to other routine management practices because many variables exist in the cow-calf business: distance traveled, gathering time, number of calves worked and numerous miscellaneous activities.

The center estimated costs of \$5 for tags, data management and verification; \$7 for working calves, tag placement and documentation; and \$8 for feedlot and harvest data

### Images



Age and source verification can work.

## columns

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**[BeefTalk: BeefTalk: Age and Source Verification Can Work](#)** (2017-10-12) Age and source verification places value on the calf and its accompanying data. [FULL STORY](#)

**[Prairie Fare: Prairie Fare: October is National Pizza Month](#)** (2017-10-12) Well-chosen toppings can make your pizza a healthful menu option. [FULL STORY](#)

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collection, and chute fees. The total cost estimate per calf worked on the ranch or elsewhere was \$20. Today, an inflation adjustment could be added, maybe.

Shrink and weight loss while handling calves is well-documented. No one debates the need to move, process and work cattle, but it does cost money. Calves are living, changing and growing biological entities. The dollars are made in growth and are meant to be profit, not cost recovery of lost weight.

This weight loss may not seem like much, but it does add up. When the center measured shrink in the cattle that were worked during the project, the center estimated \$10 to \$20 in lost income potential per calf, regardless of the management activity applied.

Behind the scenes, source and age documentation requires a verifiable and auditable process, complete with a data package. The North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, in conjunction with the center, developed CalfAID, a process-verified program through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service for source and age verification through data management, electronic animal identification (EID) and trace-back to the extent possible.

Calves that were conforming or nonconforming in regard to the process-verified program were documented using proper individual electronic identification, visual identification and appropriate paper trails, starting with the calving book. The efficacy of the process was dependent on technology working in environments that were not technologically friendly.

The project was developed using older low-frequency electronic identification technology that required restraint of cattle, significant effort and excessive time to implement. As newer high-frequency technology became available during the development of the project, many of the hurdles of using EID technology were overcome.

Improved EID technology was a major leap forward in connecting the calf and the data package and opening the door to track co-mingled and re-sorted lots of calves. The high-frequency tag read rate, with no interference or performance issues at local livestock auctions, was .338 second per group lot, with 99 percent read rates.

By placing value on the calf and the accompanying data, we also accepted the fact that there were two principles at work: trace-back and trace-forward. Marketing is strongly related to trace-forward, the process of presenting to the market - the world - a product and a data package capable of providing future assurance of the authenticity of the product.

Trace-forward is a sequential step that, when combined with trace-back, creates a synergism among what was, what is and what will be relative to authenticated producer products involved in domestic and export markets. Animal identification and disease management are closely linked and work together.

Through the center's individual identification efforts, producers have become keenly aware that trace-back, primarily a function of health, sanitary and food safety, is critical to understanding the need to maintain fully effective health regulations versus introducing new animal health risks. And that's the way it was in November 2007. I wonder how much has changed.

May you find all your ear tags.

For more information, contact your local NDSU Extension Service agent (<https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/extension/directory>) or Ringwall at the Dickinson Research Extension Center, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601; 701-456-1103; or [kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu](mailto:kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu).

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NDSU Agriculture Communication - Oct. 12, 2017

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Attachments

-  [PDF - Age and source verification can work.](#)   
(NDSU\_Extension\_Service\_BeefTalk\_101217.pdf - 17.07 Kb)
-  [EPS - Age and source verification can work.](#)  
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