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BeefTalk: Your Feedlot Game Plan -- Is It Responsive to Your Situation?

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Since starting the BeefTalk column 34 weeks ago, I have received many comments regarding the information presented. The original intent of the column was to encourage people to think, debate or just plain ponder different activities within the beef industry. While time and space precludes personalized responses, there was one comment that was especially interesting and I think needs further discussion.

Vern Anderson, an animal scientist with North Dakota State University, shared feed cost data collected at the NDSU Carrington Research Extension Center in eastern North Dakota. He provided the data in

response to a column that included feed cost data for feedlot cattle from the Dickinson Research Extension Center that were fed out of state. Dr. Anderson's response is especially valuable because it is in comparative numbers that are in the language of the feedlot industry.

The Carrington numbers were benchmarks for that herd — factual numbers and performance of feedlot cattle here in North Dakota. In addition to the performance data from the NDSU Dickinson Research Extension Center, the Carrington data gives us another set of benchmarks and another perspective. That is why I appreciated his comments. Those comments follow:

"The Carrington Research Extension Center has fed cattle for several years in North Dakota. In general, in the past 6 years, 13 sets of cattle have been finished, accounting for 1,381 head. The cattle averaged 3.53 pounds per day from weaning or arrival to slaughter and converted at 6.38 pounds of dry matter consumed per pound of live weight gain. At current feed costs in North Dakota of approximately \$62 per ton for finishing diets, the feed cost per pound of gain calculates to approximately 23 cents per pound for the 1,381 head average. In comparison to the Dickinson Research Extension Center's steers, at 4.07 pounds gain, feed costs were just over 37 cents per pound. Clearly, there's a strategic advantage for feeding in North Dakota."

These comments, focusing on the bottom line, encourages producers to make decisions based on factual data, and not gut feeling. The beef industry, even in North Dakota, is a very large industry with many segments. BeefTalk touches upon those segments, with many different responses, ultimately encouraging producers to do their own pencil pushing. What works in Dickinson or Carrington may not work on your farm, but data from

those locations may help you think critically about your own enterprises.

Producers need to talk numbers--real numbers--and be open to discussion, comment or thought. BeefTalk articles are not a promotion but a discourse, a conversation on what is happening and relevant to today's decision making process.

The Dickinson Research Extension Center is obviously used as the backdrop for these columns, but seldom does any article contain an answer that is pertinent to all cattle producers. BeefTalk is designed to trigger a thought process from which individual producers can gain the knowledge to make decisions. The value of numbers, such as those provided for feed costs, should aid each individual in reaching a decision through comparing their own numbers with benchmark values.

It is especially important to remember there are several variables, each with benchmark comparisons, that are required to make a complete well-informed decision. As in this case, total feed lot costs (fixed and variable costs) and the value of the carcass will actually determine feed lot profit or loss.

In football, the plays change based on which yard line the ball is on and who has possession of the ball. The game plan, however, remains relatively steady. The same is true in cattle feeding--you need to know the situation and adjust accordingly.

In Dr. Anderson's case, the CREC and the DREC cattle were performing and converting feed similarly. The less expensive ration, developed here in North Dakota, should have a positive impact on total costs. Each producer must make that decision based on available inputs and outputs to the total

operation.

Do you know your game plan, and if so, which yard line are you on? 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 BT0035.

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Benchmark Comparisons		
	NDSU Dickinson Research Extension Center	NDSU Carrington Research Extension Center
Current feed cost cost/pound of gain	\$.37	\$.23
Historical feed conversion pounds of dry matter/pounds of gain	6.22 lbs	6.38 lbs
Historical average daily gain	3.11 lbs	3.53 lbs

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