

# NEWS

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## **BeefTalk: Ogeechee – Brighter from the East, Record Keeping Continues to Progress**

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The sun rises from the east. Every day is a new day, and as the Cherokee would say, Ogeechee, a word that means brighter from the East. In 1993, three individuals, Richard Willham, Roy Wallace and the late Frank Baker, compiled 25 years of history surrounding the improvement of the beef cattle industry through genetics and record keeping by publishing "Ideas Into Action."

This book, dedicated to the next 25 years, records the efforts of dedicated individuals that helped found and permanently anchor the beef cattle industry in performance. Perhaps, the industry is still in the glow of a new

day. As noted in "Ideas Into Action," the first written record of beef cattle performance was in Lascaux, France around 15,000 B.C. Granted, the bull was sketched rather than described because ear tags, pen and paper weren't readily available, but the thought was still there. A picture is still worth a thousand words, but in today's fast-paced industry the glow of the morning sun must give way to a meaningful and constructive day.

Fundamentally, the beef cattle industry and the producers within the industry are driven by economic indicators--what makes money draws attention. Producers within the cow calf segment of the industry have depended on others to provide those economic indicators, and subsequently may not have connected their own individual animal data with those economic indicators. The end result was, and still is, an industry with significant individual herd record sets with a variety of meanings. As with the bull on the cave wall, individual animal data is still often quite descriptive in nature and difficult to interpret.

There are as many reasons producers keep herd records as there are producers. The individual purpose and meaning of each record must first have relevance to the producer. For each producer color of tag, letter of the alphabet, Arabic number or symbol represents a different image or meaning as did the bull in the cave over 17,000 years ago.

Then, as now, when cattle producers gather these images come to life as a flow of information, congeniality and friendships that ultimately make up the cattle industry. Is it any surprise that individual herd records are still relatively unstandardized and not prone to large industry trend analysis? Maybe the image of the beef animal and the associated industry resides in the heart as well as in the mind, and reducing a cow to a simple electronic identification with numbers one can calculate misses the whole point.

But, as the sun sets on each day, we still all need to survive. And as was noted in "Ideas Into Action," why not learn from the Frank Bakers of the world? What was developed in the past is true now -- the principal features of effective record programs involve individual identification and description followed by the systematic recording of traits of economic value.

At minimum, these descriptive traits include date of birth, sex, and the mother's identification. The traits of economic value generally involve the recording of body weight around weaning time, perhaps again at a year of age and then at harvest. Some indication of body makeup (fat versus muscle, and frame size) are desirable at each weigh day as well as carcass weight, quality grade and yield grade at the time of harvest. Sounds simple, but the bull in the cave had none of these recorded, and the perceived image versus data reality is still adrift in the cattle industry.

May you find all your ear tags.

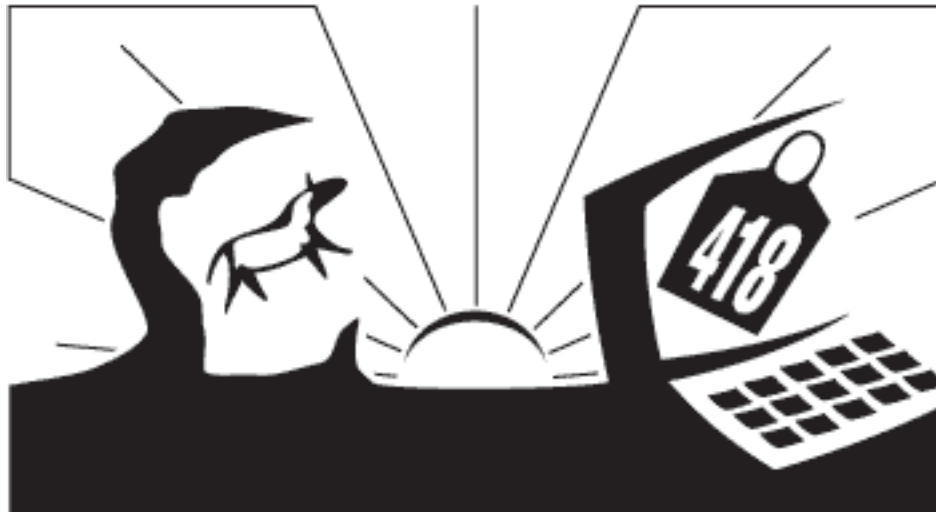
Your comments are always welcome at [www.BeefTalk.com](http://www.BeefTalk.com) For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to [www.CHAPS2000.COM](http://www.CHAPS2000.COM) on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0050.

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# Evolution of Beef Record Keeping



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