

October 25, 2001



NDSU Extension Service

## **BeefTalk: Good Questions are Abundant, but Answers Require Solid Research**

**By Kris Ringwall, Extension Beef Specialist,**

Every so often the Dickinson Research Extension Center invites in producers to offer suggestions or inspiration as to the direction the beef industry is headed. Almost everyone can discuss very matter-of-factly how today went. Most can recall a pretty good version of yesterday. The day before yesterday will come with a dash of modified recall. And, of course, yesteryears will bring down yarns and stories, long since accepted as gospel.

Ask about tomorrow, and the crowd thins quickly. However, with a certain amount of tugging comments do surface. Believe it or not, there is a future for beef production.

Driving to the new winter staging area for beef operations at the North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension Center, changes are evident. Corn, instead of being chopped by a machine, is being grazed by cows. Calves are looking over the tops of their mothers. And hip roof barns are being replaced with fabric hoops and board windbreaks. These changes attest to an ever-changing environment for the beef cow.

A morning of discussion, followed by a plate of roast beef, potatoes, gravy and all the trimmings, certainly gets a person thinking. Producers shared their thoughts and following are the highlights.

Starting at my right, a general thought surfaced regarding how much of this land really needs to be broken up. Could not more of the land be used to produce forage and beef? Well, if a producer increased the beef herd, how much labor would be available? This is the first strong discussion. Labor is a limiting factor for operations involving beef cattle, particularly at specific times such as calving. Solutions were not readily apparent, so the impact of spreading out calving may need to be examined.

The next thought involved when should weight be put on calves. Is pre-weaning weight gain through creep feeding better than post weaning weight gain in the lot? Efficient weight gain is certainly a researchable question.

Identification of beef industry inefficiencies was noted, along with the role the center can play in determining the cost for a producer to make a shift toward overcoming inefficiencies. Implementation of technology may benefit the industry but may not provide real cash for the cow calf producer. This is a true reality check for researchers.

Production questions probably have not changed much during the last 100 years, but asking the same questions in the light of a different economic environment may change the answer. Well-focused questions constantly were voiced, and those of us at the center were reminded to keep the producer in mind.

Water was, and still is, a major limiting factor for many operations, so how can we solve the water problem? How much forage does a cow waste when grazing corn? Can cattle be managed to offset accumulated waste problems? Are there more efficient cow wintering scenarios? Can a producer early wean calves at 150 to 180 days of age? What impacts reproductive traits the most? What are appropriate genetic inputs? Could the marketing year be spread out, along with the implementation of efficient grazing systems? What is the cost per unit of nutrient in harvested versus grazed forages?

The comments continued as the discussion came to a close. All in all, the producers suggested knowing and evaluating resources is critical. Even after many years, the evaluation of resources is still needed as times change, producers change, cows change.

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 BT0062.

###

**Source:** Kris Ringwall, (701) 483-2427, [kringwal@ndsuent.nodak.edu](mailto:kringwal@ndsuent.nodak.edu)

**Editor:** Tom Jirik, (701) 231-9629, [tjirik@ndsuent.nodak.edu](mailto:tjirik@ndsuent.nodak.edu)



[Click here for a printable PDF version of this graphic.](#) (5KB b&w graph)

[Click here for a printable EPS version of this graphic.](#) (76KB b&w graph)

[Click here for a EPS file of the BeefTalk logo suitable for printing.](#)  
(100KB b&w logo)