

NEWS

North Dakota State University -- **NDSU Agriculture
Communication**

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NDSU Extension Service

BeefTalk: Listen to Ideas from the Next Generation of Beef Producers

By Kris Ringwall, Extension Beef Specialist,

One of the unique joys of working within a university setting is that new ideas or thoughts are never very far away. The initial assumption is that the faculty is a great reference source. But, with the start of each semester, a whole new set of ideas comes--from the students. These students literally arrive from all over the world and bring to a classroom a wide array of knowledge and attitudes from the industries and communities in which they grew up.

Universities establish educational goals and curriculums to help individuals make sound career and enterprise decisions. Within the North Dakota beef industry, North Dakota State University and Dickinson State University joined forces to accomplish these goals. Individual ideas, skills and

abilities are enhanced to prepare students for careers as beef entrepreneurs who can respond to the dynamic interactions of a changing industry, rural environment and urban society.

One of the courses, "Problems in Beef Cattle Management," provides students with tools useful in managing a beef cow/calf enterprise. Students are assigned a North Dakota cow/calf mentor operation presently utilizing the CHAPS (Cow Herd Appraisal of Performance Software) analytical process. The students evaluate the current CHAPS records for the herd, make two herd visits and prepare a written and oral report. These reports are presented to the class and individual recommendations are presented to each mentor herd.

Hopefully, the classroom learning environment, as well as the practical environment of the working ranch, instill sound production and business principles within each individual student. Even the CHAPS mentor herds have benefitted, just as the faculty has, from new ideas put forth by students.

The combination of new and old ideas is always needed in every industry. No industry moves into the future with old ideas. The North Dakota beef industry must also grab onto these new students, take the best from the past and add the brilliance of the future to survive. And survival is a question in the beef business, according to statistics from the North Dakota Agricultural Statistics Service.

In 1986, the NDASS reported 15,000 beef cow operations. The industry lost 1,100 operations in 1987, lost 200 in 1988, gained 700 in 1989, gained 300 in 1990, lost 200 in 1991, lost 500 in 1992, lost 800 in 1993, lost 500 in 1994, lost 200 in 1995, stayed even in 1996, lost 200 in 1997,

gained 400 in 1998, stayed the same in 1999 and lost 400 operations in 2000. All told, that is 2,700 beef producers, almost 20 percent, or one out every five beef operators no longer in beef production.

So, what is the point? It's new versus old technology.

All of the students appreciate the opportunity to interact with the CHAPS mentor herds. All students receive a tremendous amount of informal education during the mentor visits, which supplements educational curriculum offerings about the beef business.

Here is the bottom line. Each student is asked at the start and throughout the semester, "How can this increased knowledge be utilized on your own operation?" A common response is, "We don't do it." What a missed opportunity.

The beef industry has lost almost 20 percent of the operations in 15 years. So when your son or daughter comes home for Christmas and you ask them, "Well, what did you learn?" listen up.

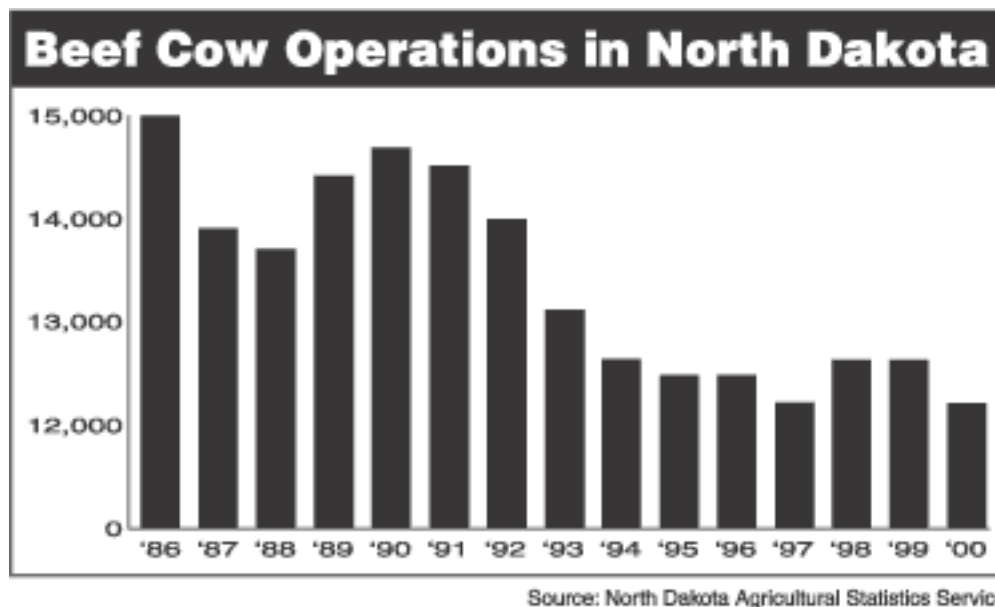
May you find all your ear tags.

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 BT0068.

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