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## In the World of Agriculture, Almost is Not Good Enough

By Kris Ringwall  
Extension Beef Specialist  
NDSU Extension Service



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Like the seasonal change of summer giving way to fall, the prospects of change within production agriculture gradually will have a big impact on the future.

Right now, we are occupied with the fact that summer is coming to an end. Some would ask, "What summer?" but for those out and about at night, the change is noticeable. The chill of fall is here.

The summer season was somewhat erratic and grossly unfair with the distribution of moisture. This summer also will stand out, however, because of various incidents, all which complicate life. The common thread to all the incidents was "Almost is not good enough." The season was hardly underway when circumstances caused the summer to buck just a little bit harder than normal.

At the North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension Center, it all started while reviewing the planting intentions versus actual planting. A check reviewed a different variety of corn was seeded on several acres. The corn was a well-intended gift from the local corn dealer. However, the corn happened to be a GMO (genetically modified) corn, requiring additional paperwork and a production contract. There was nothing wrong with the corn; however, the frustration of contract details can cause more than mild indigestion, especially when received after the corn was planted.

The complexity of life, and specifically agricultural food production, is challenging. Maintaining GMO corn required additional production practices, and all needed to be taken seriously. Soon after the clarification of planted acres, sorting through labels to apply the appropriate herbicide with no grazing restrictions was the next hurdle. Everything needs to be done right. In years past, precision was a pitchfork or two, or a coffee can with a line scratching the paint to mark the appropriate fill line. Today, the coffee can has been replaced by sophisticated bottles, containers and lab equipment. Parts per million are routinely tracked, and if you drop a red blood cell somewhere, once the DNA is recorded, you are "it."

Detectable levels of most biological compounds are so small, bright minds have difficulty providing understandable examples. Signing a contract to assist in the management and production of not the corn, but the very DNA within each corn cell seems challenging at the very least. Herbicides used on forage crops can be detected in the subsequent forage sample and traced through the production chain. In years like this, crop residues from acres intended to be used only for grain production and managed for grain production may not be suitable for livestock feed.

Cattle cannot be grazed on corn if the corn was treated with a herbicide with grazing restrictions. Unfortunately, many of these potential combinations and interactions between crop production and livestock production have not been studied, and the answers are not known. The bottom line: almost is not good enough. The challenges of providing the absolute perfect product for the customer are mounting, not because the cow is changing, but because the scientific eye is now magnified. As a producer, all the "i"s need to be dotted and "t"s crossed.

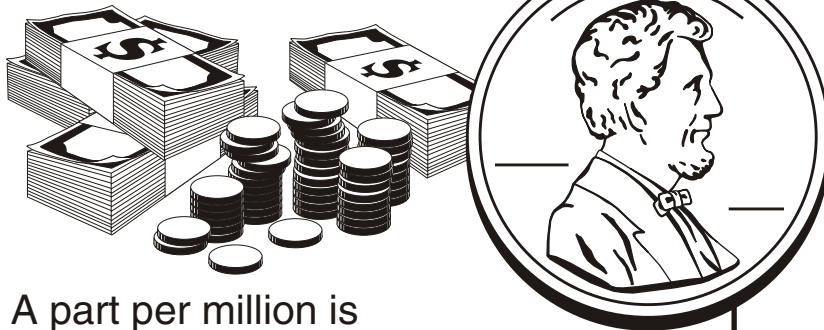
As we prepared to send cattle to Future Beef, a Kansas beef processor, similar issues appeared. Were the cattle ever exposed to feed containing animal protein? Was the right supplement loaded at the feed store, or did a last-minute bargain result in a different product being loaded? Why the bargain? Read the tag, and look for small print with big letter impact. Well, Future Beef's doors were shut before the paperwork was even finished, but the question is not going away. At what level is the livestock producer held accountable?

I don't pretend to know the answer, but I can assure you, "Almost is not good enough."

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 BT0107.

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# One Part Per Million and Counting...



A part per million is  
equal to one penny in \$10,000