

## How do I get \$600 for My Calves?

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Interacting with local producers while processing, shipping and marketing calves is always fun and rewarding. This year, a new extension program called "SmartCows" has given staff at the North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension Center more of an opportunity to assist and interact with producers, especially producers lacking labor or proper facilities.

As we have traveled some of the roads less traveled (at least by the rest of the country), the reception by producers has been positive. Implementing new technology has been a challenge, but that challenge does not come from any lack of desire or willingness.

In most cases, facilities of some sort can be located, but the absence of help is ringing loud. The number of active beef operations with the "next generation" absent from the operation is painstakingly evident alongside the chute.

Using the SmartCows program, seven crew members work in synchronization (working a calf about every 45 seconds) to resemble a reasonably equipped operating room.

Processor no. 1 moves calves to the tub from the corral and guides the calves to the alley within the tub. Processor no. 2 escorts calves into and through the alley. Processor no. 3 controls entry into the actual scale and chute. Processor no. 4 controls the head gate and restrains the calf.

Processor no. 5 (a beef quality assurance certified professional) administers the desired vaccines and processor no. 6 records calf weight, sex, tag number and all work done by the other processors. Making changes in ear tags or administering ear implants requires processor no. 7.

When all the work is done (about 45 seconds later), the head gate swings forward, the calf is released and the process starts all over again until the pen is emptied. Hopefully, the calves move at a pace of less than a minute per calf. The ideal situation would allow for an assistant for each processor and someone of notable

stature (grandpa) to supervise the entire operation.

This preconditioning program is a repeat of the process when the calves were born with the addition of 400 to 500 pounds on each calf, which has shifted the labor scale considerably in favor of the calf. This growth leads to one of the reasons producers are prohibited from entering the technological age of available labor. We see the same phenomenon with our crop-growing neighbors as evidenced by grain in the dough stage well past the average frost date. Time is the ultimate balance between size and money.

The SmartCows crew has worked several hundred calves so far and logged considerable miles while establishing a new template for beef cattle management. The typical herd enrolled in the Cow Herd Appraisal and Performance Software (CHAPS) program will produce 600-pound calves based on the average of all the calves big and little from almost 90 percent of the cows exposed to the bull the previous spring. These calves, when cruising in the feedlot, should have an average daily gain of more than four pounds and potentially gross over \$800 on the rail. Given reasonable feeding charges, the potential for a \$600 return still exists.

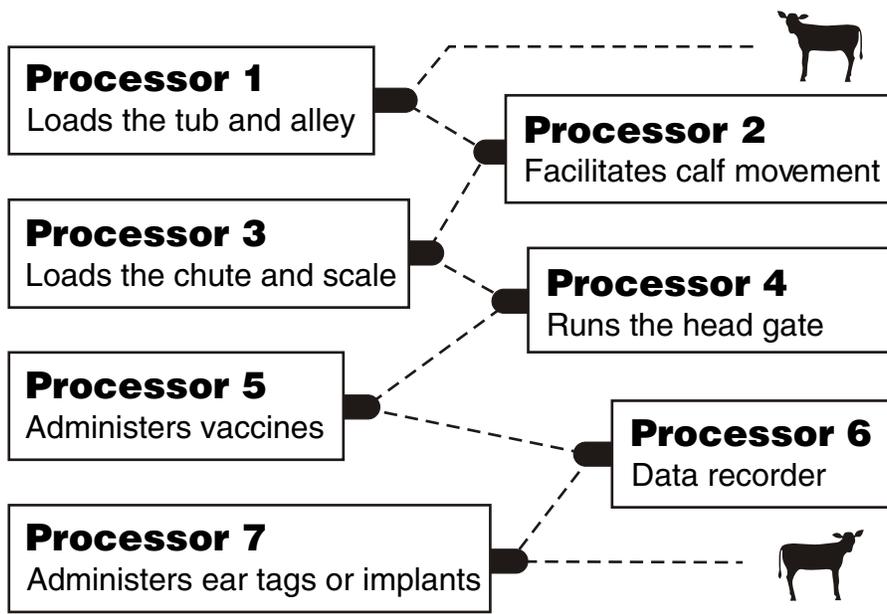
CHAPS beef producers find the future in their own data, painstakingly collected chute-side as processor no. 6 or rain or shine, snow or sleet or records calf identification, weight and sex, one calf at a time. Performance, enhanced with proper preconditioning, assures a calf with a top-quality, predictable return.

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 BT0111.

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# Typical Crew for Processing Calves Under the SmartCows Program



**Processor 8** — Supervises the whole process