

Producers Know their Cattle With eSmartCows!

By Kris Ringwall
Extension Beef Specialist
NDSU Extension Service



Last summer the North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension Center launched an initiative called "SmartCows."

The Center provided labor, facilities and traveled to producers who wanted to have their cattle worked. With all the shop talk regarding the pending County of Origin Labeling requirements, now would be a good time to share the crew's experiences.

Adam Ottmar shared the following diary of the visits, visits that for some were the first experience of working cattle on the "range." Adam noted the "Smart Cows" pre-weaning package was an easy and affordable means for any producer to weigh, vaccinate, and record data on pre-weaned calves without the hassle of facilities and labor.

In the SmartCows system, the producers supply the vaccine and the cattle. From there, the SmartCows team takes over. The team included five professional cattle handlers from the Dickinson Research Extension Center along with a mobile facility which consisted of two portable corrals, a portable tub, and a working chute.

Adam noted the first trip was a windy one for the crew as they journeyed roughly 80 miles (one way) to southwest North Dakota. The cattle were conveniently located in one area so only one setup was necessary. The ground was rough and uneven which made the placement of the scale difficult. Once everything was in place the crew began processing the 126 head of calves. The producer had previously arranged for his cows to be ultrasounded so once the calves were finished the crew did the ultrasounding as well. The equipment proved itself worthy of long travel and harsh conditions from the beginning.

The second trip was a brief 60 mile trek to another southwest North Dakota producer. At this operation, there were three locations that totaled 350 head. Only calves were worked and conditions were mild. One working location was in the middle of a stubble field that was dusty but quite simple to set up. The calves were new to the facilities which made things more difficult and time consuming. Yet, with patience, things went quite smoothly.

Distance was tested on the third trip. The crew headed to northwestern North Dakota (250 miles one way) where the team worked 298 calves at three sites. The New Town bridge, a couple of missed turns, and bitter cold proved to be the only true challenges on that trip. The two-day trip turned out to be an enjoyable one with cooperative calves, friendly producers, and some great café dining.

On the way home, another northwest North Dakota producer had his calves preconditioned by the crew. With 110 calves at two sites, the workday was short and sweet as the crew worked from the middle of the pastures. The only setback of the day was one wrong turn.

As fall set in, good blasts of North Dakota's icy wind made the day feel like an eternity for the Smart Cow crew as they worked 135 calves at two sites and drove 380 miles to another location.

The crew also headed to the eastern side of the state to work 218 calves at two sites. After the 300 mile (one way) trip the crew worked along side the local veterinarian to finish the job in great time. Great home cooking after the first site warmed the group after a cold morning and brought good story telling as well. The afternoon made for short work and the crew began the long ride home.

The last trip of the year took the crew to the northwest corner of the state to work 211 calves at two sites. Uneven ground ended up being quite a problem at the first site and soft dirt posed challenges at the second. The day was finished with good spirits and the roadwork for Smart Cows 2002 was complete.

Next week I will look at the costs, but rest assured cattle producers are no slouches when it comes to knowing their cattle. 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 BT0143.

BeefTalk

“In today’s beef world, it is essential to keep accurate records of your herd from the day they are born to the day they are taken to sale. The future of beef production has changed.”

Adam Ottmar
College Student,
Manning, North Dakota