

Picking Up the Tab: An Uneasy Moment

By Kris Ringwall
Extension Beef Specialist
NDSU Extension Service



The beef industry seems to be coming to grips with the need to identify the location and movement of cattle over time, as well as the place of origin. The process, although not fully developed, will probably involve the United States Animal Identification Plan (USAIP) in some way.

There appears to be a common thread among beef producers about the need for an identification plan but a common question is *who pays?* The current ID discussion reminds me of the typical gathering among family, friends or coworkers. Someone suggests the group go to coffee, lunch or dinner. No one revealed a plan to pay for the occasion, so all concerned are slightly uneasy until finally someone generously reaches out and picks up the tab.

Obviously several solutions could be arrived at. The bill could be split between certain parties, everyone could simply pay their own or a philanthropist could step up and pay the entire bill. As parents, we all ask, or at least ask internally, *When do the kids pay their own way?* The point is not so much who pays when an expense is incurred but how the bill is paid. What is the process? Has a discussed age or time been set for the children to pay? Is an assumed graduated plan of starvation, put in place by default, acceptable? Is your retirement check cut between you and the kids? It points out the importance of developing a plan.

One identification idea advanced by a gentleman was that a simple payment or cost share could be paid to the owner at the time of sale. In this case, \$5 was suggested as a partial payment for the added work load, a work effort that affects the whole beef chain, not just the original or birth owner of record. Granted, several options could be developed, but the most important point is that a process needs to be implemented and a fair distribution of expense attained so the person making the reservation doesn't get stuck with the whole bill.

In reference to the restaurant gathering, if a couple is invited out for supper by another couple, a common as-

sumption is that the couple extending the invitation is paying. Although, if not noted, three options could occur; the inviting couple picks up the bill, the bill is split between both couples or, in the worst-case scenario, the invited couple gets stuck with the bill. Historical protocols help, but the best solution is simply to offer to pay as the inviting couple picks up the check. Or you could ask, *How much is our portion?* Whatever words seem appropriate, are better stated than simply walking off and leaving the remaining party the check.

The beef industry is very much in the same position. More conversation needs to be embarked on to assure a fair and impartial splitting of the check. To simply assume the beef producer can pick up the check is, at the bare minimum, rude and very unfair.

Where does the industry go from here? Perhaps, as the producer stated, the obvious is sometimes too simple. The bill needs to be figured correctly, followed by development of shared obligations. Each part of the beef chain should carry its fair share.

The slope is only getting steeper. Good communication, good data and good relationships will allow for a fair process to evolve. As the owner, make sure the lack of knowledge about one's own cattle does not produce a one sided transaction. The need for solid individual cost and performance outcomes is more critical now than ever before.

Some will say life is unfair, but procrastination will get you nowhere. It's time to make sure you have a good cow attached to every one of your USAIP ear tags.

May you find all your USAIP 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 BT0188.

Who Picks Up the Tab?

