

## How Do You Spell Beef? Change

By Kris Ringwall  
Extension Beef Specialist  
NDSU Extension Service



If one thing is certain, the beef industry is in for change. Change is often not a welcomed word, but an inevitable part of the world we live in. When change is not welcome, the impact of unwanted change is minimized through repeated attempts at creating change. The end result is that change comes gradually, but nevertheless does come.

The current state of affairs in the beef business is very positive because dollars are moving and cow-calf producers are keeping some change as the money moves through the operation. With such an environment as a backdrop, the implementation of a system to trace cattle back within 48 hours is hatching and certainly moving forward.

In reviewing a recent article from the National Institute for Animal Agriculture entitled *Animal Identification Taking Shape*, the synopsis was that the USDA process was advancing. The Dickinson Research Extension Center is assisting selected herds in placing EIDs (electronic identification tags) in this year's calf crop with the hopes of evaluating the current EID system. The project was designed to follow the guidelines in the U.S. Animal Identification Plan, a plan developed by several segments within the animal industry. The challenges to date do not involve the process of placing the tag, but logistical problems of reaching cattle in extensive beef operations.

The efficiency of working cattle certainly drops when equipment failure occurs 30 miles from town. The need to carry backup equipment becomes very obvious, but doubles the equipment cost. But mechanical problems only scratch the surface. There is another problem, although subtle, which is the response by individual producers to information requested by the DREC in the process of working their cattle.

The same forms were used in a cattle management class at Dickinson State University. The students were asked to fill out the forms using their own herds. Hesitation was a common response. The concept of privacy,

the inclusive keeping of records, the internal utilization of information, in contrast to the public offering of individual ranch activities, causes producers to at least ask why information is needed.

Here in lies the deepest, most sensitive point of change. Regardless of reason, the implementation and potential utilization of any system that provides an umbilical cord back to the ranch changes forever the fundamental principals of how many producers have conducted business.

Gone are the handshakes, the slight nods of understanding and the feelings of belonging. So putting tags into calf ears, wand the tag, transmitting the tag information to a database and storing information thousands of miles away may seem easy, but the change is not. Change comes little by little, first this step, than that step, and sooner or later, the big step. The big step seals the door to the past and moves to the future.

Perhaps efficiency will be improved, maybe the computer programs will eventually work, the equipment may even last the day without being stepped on and some of the cattle that are not doing well will be eliminated from the production system. The bottom line, that sense of cattle husbandry, the family ranch, the feeling of unity, the purity of honesty, is now diminished and replaced by a computer key, and when pushed, the doorbell may ring. *Could you just answer a few questions for me?*

May you find all your USAIP 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 BT0213.

---

**BEEF = CHANGE**