
Currently, out of every 100 calves entering the marketing system, 15 are lost

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Tracing cattle is a hot topic. There have been many coffee-table discussions on the relevancy of the effort, but if a producer ponders the current state of affairs, the beef industry is in relatively good shape.

Disasters could be in the making, but the more typical problems encountered are man-made. The beef industry is no more or less at risk than any other industry. While producers may feel somewhat vulnerable, the beef industry needs to deal with the future in much the same manner as other industries.

How is the current beef industry doing? The answer to this question is more relevant today than asking what the industry should do in the future.

The Dickinson Research Extension Center and the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association implemented the CalfAID program in 2004. The goal was to have a better understanding of the current state of the beef industry regarding electronic cattle identification and the ability to actually track cattle. The study has yielded considerable data and still is compiling input.

On the ability to trace cattle, two questions came up. How effectively can the current system track cattle movement and how effective is the electronic identification of individual calves?

In terms of the first question, the center, based on the expressed interest following informational meetings and news releases, selected 25 producers in North Dakota. The center worked 4,672 calves within these herds, traveling 3,762 miles.

After the calves were tagged, individual producers conducted business as usual. The center's team initiated trace-back efforts once the calves were sold. To date, 1,430 miles have been logged and a total of 379 hours of personnel time have been spent tracking the 4,672 calves. Tracking has involved extensive contact with producers, stockyards, brand offices, buyers, backgrounders and feeders.

To date, 1,088 calves (23.3 percent of the 4,672 calves tagged) remain with the producers as replacements. Of the remaining 3,584 calves, approximately 55 percent moved

directly to their next destination, while 45 percent moved through established marketing channels.

As these calves were traced by the DREC, 955 calves (26.6 percent of the 3,584 marketed calves) were moved into 23 backgrounding facilities and 2,090 calves (58.3 percent of the 3,584 marketed calves) arrived at 25 different feedlots in several states. Five calves (less than 0.1 percent) were slaughtered, and unaccounted for are 534 calves (14.9 percent of 3,584 marketed calves).

Of the 25 herds, 15 herds were 100 percent traceable utilizing the existing systems available to track cattle. Ten herds lost more than 33 percent of their calves entering the marketing channels. Of the total 4,672 calves tagged, 88.6 percent of all the calves tagged were located and 11.4 percent were unaccounted for, additional efforts are underway to trace them.

The principle point of loss was during the marketing process. Calves simply moved through or were commingled with larger groups of calves. Subsequently, the ability to follow the calf to the next destination was not available or not recorded.

The process shows that the current system of cattle tracking is working, but is not 100 percent effective. At what point additional systems are required is unknown. Additional diligence throughout the industry certainly can cut down on the percentage of calves currently not accounted for.

Time will tell, coffee will be drunk, but for now, we do not yet have data on 15 out of every 100 calves entering the marketing system.

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 BT0235.

Traceable Versus Unaccounted for Calves

Dickinson Research Extension Center CalfAID™ Team

Total recorded calves	4,672
Total calves marketed	3,584
Total traced calves	3,052 (85%)
Total unaccounted calves	534 (15%)*

* Additional efforts are underway to trace.