

Tracking, backtracking and retracking - the saga continues

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The Dickinson Research Extension Center is evaluating the process involved with tracking cattle. The results have not always been positive, but the data collection continues.

The effort is important because the beef cattle industry needs information to assist with decisions relative to age and source verification. The data could be important in implementing a tagging system and a mechanism for tracking cattle as they pass through the many different enterprises involved in raising beef cattle.

The center has accounted for the location of 89 percent of the CalfAID calves tagged last fall. The remaining calves are slowly being accounted for, but calf movement never stops, so numbers are relevant to the current date.

While initial tracking is intensifying, one needs to remember that this initial step is simply a location step. (For example, where 100 percent of the calves are accounted for, it means producer A tagged 200 calves and the center simply knows 40 calves remain at home as replacements, 50 calves went to feedlot A, 50 calves went to feedlot B and 60 calves went to backgrounder C.)

The location of an individual calf may not be known, as that phase of the study is just underway. Initial results indicate that finding individual calves by electronic ID is challenging. Thirty-two backgrounding operations have at least one of the 4,672 calves that originally were tagged. Total CalfAID calves accounted for in the backgrounding facilities to date are 955 calves. Not every facility has been contacted, but of those that were, 18 have 10 or fewer calves commingled with other calves, four facilities have 11 to 20 calves commingled and 10 background feeders have from 23 to 77 calves.

The small number of calves in facilities located over the north-central region makes accounting for the tags very difficult. Of the 20 facilities contacted, 11 facilities have cut the CalfAID tags off. Five still have the tags in, but we don't have the ability to access the calves. The remaining four background feeders are making the CalfAID calves accessible to the center to scan the tags. The four background feeders represent 157 calves of the total 955 calves accounted for at backgrounding facilities.

In regard to the feedlot side of the business, a similar scenario exists. Of the 2,114 CalfAID calves in 25 feedlots, nine feedlots have 20 or fewer calves from the 4,672 calves, while the remaining 16 feedlots have from 33 to 354 calves.

To date, 23 of the feedlots have been contacted. Five feedlots have cut off the electronic CalfAID tags, one feedlot cut off the CalfAID tags and replaced them with its own tags, five still have the CalfAID tags, but we have no ability to access the calves and 13 feedlots have indicated the ability to make the CalfAID calves accessible for scanning.

Of those 13 yards, five yards (four managed by one company) have the capability to utilize electronic identification technology. The 13 yards hold 1,331 of the calves tagged through the CalfAID program. If this were a basketball game, the halftime statistics would show that Team Backgrounders is shooting a little more than 16 percent, while Team Feedlot is shooting just less than 63 percent. These numbers reflect the percentage of calves traced to either a backgrounding or feedlot facility and still indicate a potential to read the electronic ID tag.

As indicated earlier, these numbers will change. For many reasons, calves that were not available at one time become available and calves that were available become unavailable. It's only halftime, and the center's staff and others are diligently and methodically sorting numbers. If people tell you this is a simple task, they are simply not aware of the magnitude of the task. That's the bottom line.

It would help a lot if the ear tags were not cut off. Stay tuned.

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 BT0237.

