

North Dakota Stockmen's Brand Inspection Service Adds 15 Percent

By Kris Ringwall
Extension Beef Specialist
NDSU Extension Service



The Dickinson Research Extension Center has been busy tracking cattle. As part of the CalfAID pilot project, the DREC placed electronic identification tags (EIDs) in 4,672 calves this past summer and fall. The goal was to record the movement of the calves as a group and as individuals.

Currently, 1,088 calves are still on the home place and 3,584 have entered the market channels and moved to new homes. Since the CalfAID traceback began in early winter, all but 510 calves (14.2 percent) were located by premises. A premises-to-premises track is not an individual animal traceback; rather it identifies the premise where each calf could be.

If a producer sold calves to three different locations, the center still does not know each calf at each premises. The center simply knows there are three locations a calf could be. The EID tracking will come later.

Is this good enough? In a broad context, yes, being able to locate more than 85 percent of the calves is excellent. However, allowing almost 15 percent through with no location identified means the next step of tracking the individual numbers is already 15 percent in the hole. The point being, a producer can't read an EID tag unless you know where the calf is.

Why we lost 510 calves is a common question. A common thread for those operations unresponsive to the request was poor record management, uncooperative buyers, commingling and re-sorting of calves within the marketing channel. To sum it up, attitude was keen. Proudly, on a simple request for information, more than 85 percent of the requests were honored diligently. Mark that benchmark 85 percent successful.

The desire to find the 510 calves grew and the North Dakota Stockmen's Brand Inspection Service stepped up to meet the challenge. The brand service took on the commitment to find the unaccounted for calves.

Darryl Howard, chief brand inspector, made a personal commitment to go to the end of the line to find them. At the end of the line, brand inspectors located 494 of the 510 calves. That raised the final count to 3,568 calves out of 3,584, or just more than 99.5 percent premises location achieved. The remaining 16 calves were traced to a single source, but the ability to track the final location became futile because records lacked sufficient clarity. So, congratulations to an industry that is well served

by the CalfAID and the North Dakota Stockmen's Association Brand Inspection Service.

A point to ponder: the industry is in a very serious quandary over animal health issues. Not only does the dollar cost of tracking proposals continue to climb, the dollar cost of secondary impacts within the industry is huge. There is no template available, so arriving at any type of cost analysis would be pure conjecture at this point.

Put aside the costs and consider the impacts on relationships, friendships, neighbors and people divided by imaginary lines. These challenges will take a very human toll on a business that prides itself as a way of life. There are days when that way of life is simply no fun.

For now, we can take pride in the fact that some things work well. Present systems of tracking cattle do work because we can locate cattle on a premises within 48 hours.

To improve on the premises location system is difficult because 99.5 percent is a hard score to duplicate. The ability to track an individual animal for its own sake, following an individual EID from premises to premises is only in its infancy compared with the experience of known brand inspectors.

Individual identification, whether visual or electronic, remains a process that provides much more than individual or premises tracking. Individual identification is a management tool for the beef industry that, when used properly, can create many positive outcomes.

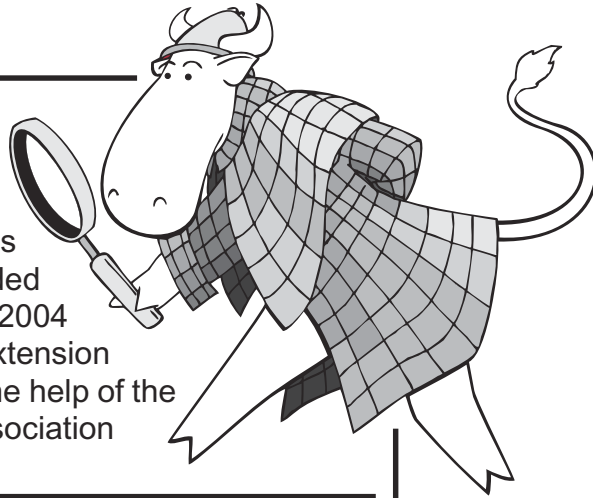
But for now, a big thank you goes out to chief brand inspector Darryl Howard and his inspectors.

May you find all your brands.

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 BT0238.

The Search for Missing Calves

Percentage of traceable versus unaccounted for calves recorded during the summer and fall of 2004 by the Dickinson Research Extension Center CalfAID™ Team with the help of the North Dakota Stockmen's Association Brand Inspection Service



Total recorded calves	4,672
Total calves marketed	3,584
Total traced calves	3,568 (99.5%)
Total unaccounted calves	16