

Be Careful When Signing Age and Source Verifiable Contracts

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Too often in the beef cattle industry, producers slip into the business-as-usual mode and life moves forward. That penchant for the status quo, however, is about to end. The future for beef cattle production no longer is going to be business as usual.

The current case in point is documentation of the source and age of calves. A common response as cattle are sold is to add the phrase “source and age verified.” A few words can mean a lot or, if not appropriately stated, can imply more than what actually can be verified. To verify something, according to Webster, means to confirm or substantiate in law by oath, or establish the truth, accuracy or reality of the stated event.

When held to specific requirements, a common approach is to audit the data that is in use to substantiate the verifiable event. An audit, again according to Webster, is a formal examination of an organization or individual’s accounts or financial situation, or a methodical examination and review.

These are not words to take lightly. The typical action in today’s markets, in preparation for future source and age verification requirements, is to ask for a form of animal identification. This verification can include an electronic identification tag, a premises identification number or a 911 emergency response address, plus an assurance of written records substantiating source and birth data for the calves being sold. This information also should be placed in a working national database, along with permission to access the data by the cattle buyers.

Given the historical appreciation of stated facts within the concept of selling cattle, claims may have been made. These claims are ignored due to the inability to substantiate the claim. Often repeated sales lingo is “the calves have all their shots.” In reality, this phrase means nothing because the buyer generally revaccinates newly arrived cattle to assure the calves are vaccinated.

Seller accountability throughout the marketing process never existed. The net result was a tendency to speak

prior to thinking and the words may have stretched the truth on some groups of sale calves.

The cattle business is not going to be the same. These new processes involving the transfer of ownership are increasingly connecting the ability to verify statements made at the time of sale back to the cow-calf producer. Furthermore, subsequent sale of the calves does not release the cow-calf producer from the original claim, in this case source and age verification. The caution is simply this: Don’t state cattle can be source and age verified unless the statement can be substantiated by records. These records need to be auditable.

The impact on cow-calf producers is that, upon request, a producer will need to provide the required records to verify that an individual calf was in fact born at a certain location on a certain date within the operation. A simple notation on a calendar or in a notebook is a stretch, especially when a producer is asked to state unequivocally several months after a sale that a particular calf in question actually is the calf that was born within the operation and within a certain range of calving dates.

The answer to the question of source and age verification, at least in an auditable sense, implies the keeping of accurate cattle inventories within the operation. These inventories must be accessible and the cattle traceable. Yes, the mere fact the calf was identified individually implies you know and can prove the answer to the question. Can you?

May you find all your NAIS-approved 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 BT0258.

A Few Words Can Mean a Lot

Are your calves truly age and source verified?

ver·i·fy \ver-ə-,fī\ *vt* **-fied; -fy·ing** [ME *verifien*, fr. MF *verifier*; fr. ML *verificare*, fr. L *versus* true — more at VERY] **1**: to confirm or substantiate in law by oath **2**: to establish the truth, accuracy, or reality of

Would your records withstand an Audit?

¹au·dit \ˈod-ət\ *n* [ME, fr. L *auditus* act of hearing, fr. *auditus*, pp.]
1 a : a formal or official examination and verification of an account book **b** : a methodical examination and review **2** : the final report of an examination of books of account by auditors —
au·dit·able \-ə-bəl\ *adj*

Source Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary