

## Do Not Cut Out Tags

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The other day I was visiting with a producer who wanted carcass information on the calves he sold. His frustration was directed at the failure of the system.

None of the performance data from his calves was coming back to him. He tagged his calves with electronic ID tags and followed all the appropriate steps, but nothing happened. The principal reason was the electronic ID tags in his calves had been cut out when the calves arrived at the feed yard.

Sometimes the message needs to be very blunt: “Do not cut out electronic identification tags, commonly known as EIDs.” The EIDs may have different appearances, depending on the tag company design, but essentially they consist of a button that is attached to the ear by means of a stud.

These tags are passive electronic devices that have little to no information on them. The same holds true for all IDs that an animal may have. The visual tag IDs or brands are very important in determining who an animal is. The verification of the EID, along with visual IDs, is important to maintaining the accuracy of the database.

Beef producers do not need to feel alone. The Dickinson Research Extension Center continues to track calves. The producer who does not get data back is by far the norm.

In the previous two years, 7,282 calves have been tagged with EID tags in preparation for tracing the calves through the backgrounder, feedlot and harvest process. Our trace-back efforts have revealed 1,440 of the animals still are grazing pastures at home as replacement females.

Of the 5,842 that left the home ranch in 2004 and 2005, 3,584 calves have been lost in the system (to date) and 61.3 percent of the calves were not tracked through harvest. The most obvious reason is the tags were cut out. Once the tags are removed, all information flow stops immediately.

A very distant second reason is the inability to time-ly negotiate with individual feed yards to make arrange-

ments at the harvest facility to have the tags read so the appropriate carcass data can be collected.

The bottom line is worth repeating: “Do not cut out ear tags from cattle, and that goes for all cattle!”

Another little quirk came up in the discussion that shows the relative degree that the electronic ID is misunderstood. There is a thought by some that the EID device can record data and actually is monitoring the calf and its environment. Therefore, the tags should be cut out and destroyed.

The passive EID tag (used in the CalfAID program) is not capable of acting under its own power to record data. The tag must be read by utilizing appropriate equipment that only reads a factory-installed number that is permanently embedded in the tag. No other information is on the tag.

There are active tags that can store data. However, that tag is not promoted to any large extent in the industry. Even then, appropriate programs must be retained and utilized through specific equipment. The common low-frequency tags currently used do not record data.

The tags that do record data require special equipment that is very obvious within the work facilities. Hopefully, with time, more data will start coming back to help producers with management decisions to enhance the management of their beef cattle operations.

The center has a goal of distributing 20,000 EIDs for the expressed purpose of helping producers better understand the complexities of tagging cattle. Each year does get a little better, but one step at a time.

Remember: Do not cut out those tags.

May you find all your 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, 1041 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 BT0319.

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## **Traceability of Calves Age and Sourced Verified**

### **Dickinson Research Extension Center**

Total Tagged Calves	7,282
Calves Sold	5,842
Calves Lost	3,584
Percentage Lost	61.3%
Reason for Loss	Tags Cut Out