

## The Future of Beef

By Kris Ringwall  
Extension Beef Specialist  
NDSU Extension Service



Recently, a notice of a notice of a notice popped up in my e-mail that caught my attention. The forward was noting a recent issue of an electronic journal by the American Agricultural Economics Association.

The discussion in the “Choices” journal (Volume 21, No. 3, 2006, [www.choicesmagazine.org](http://www.choicesmagazine.org)) focused on the future of animal agriculture. Sometimes news is hard to grasp without avoiding excessive repetition, but the beef cow is an animal and the future of the beef cow is certainly at the heart of all that we do. Sharing some of the findings of this group will be the topic of this and future BeefTalk articles.

So who is this group? The effort is spearheaded by a publicly supported, nonprofit organization called the Farm Foundation ([www.farmfoundation.org](http://www.farmfoundation.org)). The breadth and depth of the undertaking was significant. As stated on its Web site, its mission is “to improve the economic health and social well-being of U.S. agriculture, the food system and rural people by helping private and public sector decision-makers identify and understand forces that will shape the future.”

The Farm Foundation partnered private and public organizations in an effort to look ahead for the next 10 years and ponder animal agriculture. Even if we don’t like it, one point we all realize is that the beef business is no longer “breed ’em, feed ’em and eat ’em.” A lot that happens on our individual operations must feed into a larger system and even the large systems we feed into ultimately feed into even larger systems.

The ability to cash flow income minus expenses may be very local, but the ability to survive as a viable beef operation into the future really needs to be much broader. This breadth is not the desired breadth of producers, but rather the breadth that the current consumer is willing to divulge in their own consumerism.

The report as published in Choices starts by identi-

fying issues that are fundamental to the future of beef, as well as all of animal agriculture. Many of the issues are divisive. These issues have been significant and have resulted in vocal point and counterpoint discussions that have been heard by all of us. Despite the discussions, the issues are still there.

The seven identified issues are: 1. markets, structure and competition, 2. value in integrated markets, 3. increasing demand, 4. environmental regulation and litigation, 5. immigration and labor, 6. animal identification and traceability systems and 7. community impacts. How many of these terms sound familiar?

In reality, they all do. Our long-term survival depends on our understanding of all seven issues. Yes, the amount of feed a beef cow eats is important, as well as the sire of next year’s calf.

The opportunity for our children and grandchildren to be active beef producers depends on their understanding of these issues. I emphasize “understanding” and not outcome because the actual outcome may or may not be what we want or perceive.

Regardless, the future structure of the beef business is contained within these seven issues, thus the title of the report, “The Future of Animal Agriculture in North America.” For the next few weeks, each of these issues will be reviewed and contemplated, hopefully for the betterment of our future.

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 BT0321.

---

## **Seven Key Issues Affecting The Future of Beef Production**

1. Markets, structure and competition
2. Value in integrated markets
3. Increasing demand
4. Environmental regulation and litigation
5. Immigration and labor
6. Animal identification and traceability systems
7. Community impacts

Published in *Choices* ([www.choicesmagazine.org](http://www.choicesmagazine.org)) and the American Agricultural Economics Association (Volume 21, No. 3, 2006)