

## Opportunity Comes with Intensity

By Kris Ringwall  
Extension Beef Specialist  
NDSU Extension Service



Many opportunities exist within agriculture. Most are driven by the opportunity to make more money, but some are driven by the opportunity to do something different.

In either case, the successful completion of the endeavor is not always positive.

Frank Kutka, sustainable agricultural specialist at the North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension Center, attended a conference on goat production. Given my background in small ruminants, primarily sheep, it didn't take long to engage in a good discussion about the conference and the world of smaller ruminants.

Having taught the key management principles involved in small-ruminant production, the learning curve often was steep and producer success was not always achieved. In the end, neither the sheep nor the goat industries have successfully engaged mainstream production levels capable of sustaining viable production scenarios of scale.

As a force within ruminant production, the vast majority of grassland-related agriculture still centers on the beef cow. The dairy cow is obviously present, but many producers have set aside the milk bucket and, with time, beef cows are grazing on the pastures.

Why beef cows? Well, the answer is not simple. One does have to be careful not to offend anyone. However, in our discussion, the phrase "opportunity comes with intensity" seemed to surface more than once.

We both concurred that, in many cases, the intensity of management needed to successfully engage a small-ruminant operation is not achieved. That statement is not meant to offend, but, having conducted many three-day, intensive schools on sheep production, it is true.

While I am quickly reminded this is a beef column, I could not help making the connection to the many issues that beef producers face. Generally, most would agree that today's beef business, if one sets aside the comfort that comes with higher prices and simply looks at the industry and then sets about engaging that industry head on, is very complicated.

Not unlike the sheep and goat business, the changes that need to be made are intense. Additional opportunity

is dependent on our willingness to engage change with intensity. Often times in the sheep business, producers complain that their sheep simply died.

No, you simply allowed the sheep to die, was my response. As a producer, you were unwilling to take the necessary managerial steps needed to ensure the survival of the sheep.

Accepting that the primary reason for failure was your own managerial decisions and general overall resistance to change is difficult to accept. The need to increase management intensity to meet the expected opportunity must be met.

In the beef industry, producers simply lack the desire to explore new opportunities. As producers look backward and forward, the need to access new opportunities needs to happen. However, often times, even when one does take on a new challenge, the intensity of the change is underestimated.

The current age and source verification effort is a good example. There are new vaccinations, reproductive techniques, breeding programs, supplementation programs, marketing exposure, business planning or simply new associates entering the business.

A new level of intensity is necessary. Refusing to increase intensity, however, means forgoing complaining about the future.

I had the great opportunity to have supper with several veterinarians from around the world. When asked what was the greatest restraint they encountered while working with producers, they commented that many do not want to change and they simply restrict their own opportunities by never allowing them to become reality.

Opportunity comes with intensity and that intensity needs to be engaged.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at [www.BeefTalk.com](http://www.BeefTalk.com).

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