

The Great Divide: Group Versus Individual Data

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The other day, a bill came across the desk. On one part of the bill was listed the number of cattle. The description of the product on the bill was carcass data information, age and source verification and the producer's name, lot and pen. The bill was for \$285 for 94 head of steers.

Images

What group of calves would you like?	
Group A	Group B
--- Individual Weights ---	
550	350
575	450
600	600
625	750
650	850
--- Average Weight ---	
600	600

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The information across the sheet also reported individual animal weights; carcass data including kidney, pelvic and heart fat (KPH); dressing percentage; quality grade; ribeye; marbling; yield grade; and back fat.

The data was great, but one important point was missing. All the cattle had been given a kill number, but the original visual and electronic identification numbers were omitted.

The missing identification numbers would not be critical if averages were all that were needed. The numbers were valid, so managerial decisions could be made based on the averages.

However, the challenge is making data meaningful for the cow-calf producers. A single line of averages does not fit the needs of the producer.

Most managerial decisions that impact the bottom line are based on groups of cattle, as well as individual cattle. Herd performance is a group evaluation that considers overall reproductive rate, growth rate, replacement rate and more.

These numbers can provide an insight into year-to-year trends. Trends are completed once a year and take a long time to compile.

Managerial decisions are based on individual cow and sire data gathered from the yearly performance of the calf. Sire group averages can be compared and evaluated against individual sire expected progeny differences.

The average of a group is nice to visit about and present, but it is the individual data that expands a producer's ability to manage a cow herd. The individual numbers allow for more effective utilization of the data.

Prior to this bill, another set of cattle was rejected from a source and age program because the individual makeup of the cattle within the group was not known. Although the tags were present, the tags were not read and confirmed.

These scenarios illustrate a common misconception within the beef industry. The misconception is that a group is all that needs to be evaluated. At some point, when the questions are actually asked and the data actually evaluated, the makeup of the data will be asked for.

Cow-calf producers need answers to questions. "What cow produced my best calf?" "What bull produced my best calves?"

In the case of a feed yard or packer, some questions also may need to be answered. "What calf was nonconforming?" Upon sale, the question may be, "What was the source of this calf, not that calf?"

The answers to these questions rest within the makeup of the group. If the makeup is not known, then neither are the answers.

In terms of the cow-calf producer, the questions simply go unanswered. In the case of the feed yard or packer, the lot of cattle simply may be passed by.

The ease of group identification is real. However, if the numbers are not affirmed through the process, good cattle become nonconforming. Nonconforming cattle do not fit and potentially could be set aside.

If someone has gone to the effort to individually identify cattle, would not the industry work hard to help get the data? Therein lays the great divide.

Individual desires and objectives are not always the same. This process leaves opportunity on the table. The corresponding frustration creates a challenge.

Progress is being made. Technology is improving, but the concept is that a group is, in reality, individual animals and often a greater response is achieved in knowing the individuals more so than simply the group.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at www.BeefTalk.com

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NDSU Agriculture Communication

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Attachments



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