

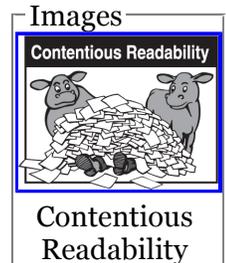
BeefTalk: Contentious Readability

We are drowning in paperwork.

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This fall, the term “drowning in paperwork” has taken on a new meaning. At least 11 pieces of paperwork have arrived as part of the beef industry's response to the need to meet various legal requirements for producing beef within the U.S.



Essentially, all 11 documents are the same. They are asking for verification by means of an affidavit or declaration that, as a producer, I understand and comply with the laws that impact the beef business.

The requests have come from livestock auction barns, feedlots and packers. They all are individually addressed to the Dickinson Research Extension Center (DREC) and represent various individuals or groups that the center has done business with through the years.

The DREC retains ownership of all cattle until slaughter, so the requests are understandable. However, the challenge is what to do with all these forms and amended forms.

Anyone who has been involved in material transactions readily understands transactions involve paperwork. A simple paper receipt for payment of goods or services is a standard business practice.

In most situations at the end of a transaction, an often-asked question is: Would I like a receipt? If the response is no, the clerk simply throws the wasted paper.

If the answer is yes, an apparently harmless piece of paper that accompanies a transaction is tucked away for the trip to the office or home. These pieces of paper pile up until a strong urge for more space wins the debate, so the piles are trashed and eventually replaced by new piles.

Interestingly, some transactional pieces even seem to be written with invisible ink because when one pulls them out for later review, the writing has simply faded away. Perhaps that is a timing question. A more timely review of the incoming documents would assure that they were readable.

The point remains: We are drowning in paperwork.

There is a tendency for recordkeepers to try to make sense of all the incoming documents. However, business managers contend they are not historians and are not here for the preservation of harvested paper.

One could safely say that the beef business historically has been paper-bound. The real question is which papers need to be preserved because of the need to reference them in the future.

The many daily transactions are documented to the extent needed and filed as determined by those responsible for an operations need. If something is needed up or down the chain of production, the default was and still is this: Ask if you need something.

In many situations, with each change of ownership, records literally are started over again. There seems to be no connectivity from one point in the production chain to the next.

That is precisely why the center was contacted to sign and return the 11 documents. The concept of data following the calves or market cows is still in an infantile stage.

In all reality, the flow needs to be electronic, but the systems available have gaps and craters and are far from streamlined. So here we are forwarding documents and transitional papers that have been amended to meet the respective transactions and, more than likely, are very difficult to retrieve.

The retrieval of existing paperwork was and still is very difficult. There is no common filing or retrieval system. Many, if not most, records still are recorded by hand, with contentious readability a real problem.

So what happens to all the current affidavits or declarations being generated within the industry? Where is the connection when we say "all livestock referenced by this document"?

What livestock is it? Is it that cow or that one over there? How do they actually connect to an animal, a place or a point in time regarding today's transaction?

Contentious readability is a new problem for beef producers. Unfortunately, the answer still has not been revealed.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at <http://www.BeefTalk.com>.

For more information, contact the NDBCIA Office, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to <http://www.CHAPS2000.com> on the Internet.

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