

BeefTalk 503: Source and Age Verification, Ouch!

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Source and age verification has a bite to it. As producers, many of the management discussions are relatively painless. The discussion is free and opinions often are welcomed. Sometimes a particular view of a subject can change when other opinions are brought to the table.

The beef business has survived successfully for a long time within a circle of facts and opinion. However, there are facts that cannot be discussed away.

For instance, the proper application of health products or nutritional supplements must be followed. Producers understand and realize the label is a very important part of the purchase. Producers purchase the product, but without the label, the product has no value. That principle is well-understood. That same line of thinking needs to apply to the current push to supply source- and age-verified (SAV) calves.

Today's producer markets a calf and the information about that calf. This is a process that is not all that different from buying a product and making sure the label is attached. The marketplace determines calf value. The value of the information, should we say the label associated with the calf, is somehow included in the package price. By placing value on the calf and the accompanying data, the cattle industry has gone the next step in the world of product marketing.

The discussion of marketing is strongly related to developing the process of presenting to the market a product and data package capable of providing future assurances of product authenticity. This is a big step and should not be taken lightly. Regardless, source and age verification certainly is a data player within beef markets.

The question of what this means is still unresolved, so for those entering the source and age market, the process can be challenging. For those working a source- and age-verification program within CalfAID through the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, the need for pristine accuracy is real.

Perhaps the message is not clear. Simply stated, if calf 101 is sold as an age- and source-verified calf, then 101 needs to be the calf that leaves the ranch, moves through various marketing channels, finishes in an appropriate feedlot and turns up on the rail at harvest as calf 101. There are no other options.

One might think this is a simple task, but it isn't. Several obstacles seem to pop up that are a cause for concern as the calves are presented for source and age verification. Generally, these concerns have roots in that this does not reflect the whole process. For instance, source and age verification does not end with the tags being placed in the calves' ear. This only starts the process.

The appropriate documentation cannot be supplied to the next buyer until all the data that is required is compiled and verified before the cattle move into the marketing channels. Once cattle leave their birth place and are comingled with other cattle, they no longer can be sourced and aged. Utilizing the NDBCIA CalfAID program as an example, producers, buyers, feedlots and sale barns need to allow 10 working days for the office to enter the data before the documentation can follow the calves. Some days the whole process can be completed quickly, but some days not, so the 10 days provide a buffer that helps make sure the data package is in order and meets program specifications.

Source and Age Verification

The process of placing value on a calf and the accompanying data that moves the cattle industry to the next step in the world of product marketing.

The visual tag, electronic identification number data sheets and copies of calf books or completed calf input forms that include the birth dates of the calves all need to be verified. Producers need to ask if each calf that leaves the ranch is verifiable and meets the requirement of the program.

For CalfAID, that means producers must submit a registration form to the CalfAID office before the process can start. Producers should not list calves as SAV unless they already are accepted into the program and understand all the requirements. Data problems can be corrected and ear tag issues can be resolved, but the data package, just like the calves, needs to be ready to present with the calves, which can take time.

The bottom line is that producers must read and understand all SAV requirements and meet them because failing to meet the program requirements hurts. Ouch!

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.