

BeefTalk: Source and Age Verification



Age and Sourced Verification - Steps for Preparation
A well-kept calving book is critical.

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One could say the future of beef starts with a calving book. Certainly, source and age verification starts with a calving book. Now is the time to be planning on getting cattle ready for source and age verification for next fall.

The North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association (NDBCIA) has participated in source and age verification for several years. The process is not complicated, but if one was to speak in general terms, the process often is not well understood.

The NDBCIA provides a calving book because, no matter how complicated various programs become, a calving book that notes the date a calf was born and the identification of that calf the day the calf was born is the best starting point there is.

Therefore, a well-kept calving book is critical. Through the years, the process has been improved. Today, producers can order calving books that already have the electronic identification (EID) preprinted. In other words, when a producer tags a calf with the herd numbering system, an EID button that matches the calving book may be placed securely in the calf's ear at the same time.

After the visual identification number is placed in the calving book and aligned with the proper EID, the calf is ready to apply to a source and age verification program. As producers, the temptation is to put off tagging calves with an EID until later in the season. The thinking is that there is uncertainty about implementing the process.

There is a challenge that the NDBCIA has seen. As producers make the decision to source and age verify, the calves already are moving into the marketing channel. Therefore, producers cannot keep up with paperwork and processing as their calves enter the marketing channels, so tempers can get a little heated.

Buyers want the appropriate assurance and verified paperwork to accompany the calves to their next place of residence. The goal of the NDBCIA is to have source and age verification completed by midsummer. That way, a producer still maintains marketing flexibility and the verification process does not have to interfere with the marketing process.

Granted, not all producers have calving books, but for those who do, why not use a calving book that has preprinted EIDs? Why not apply the EID button at calving for ease of handling and record verification?

If calving time does not work for placing an EID, branding or spring calf processing could be a good time. If done during spring processing, the EID number needs to correspond to the calving book and the tags crosschecked to assure that the correct EID was given to the right calf. The time spent doing things right certainly is rewarded come fall as the industry is searching for more and more verified calves. The future is complicated. The processes and documentation required for verification are not going to go away. We no longer sell our calves to the neighbor to feed out. Producers sell their calves to the world.

As calves enter the marketplace, there are very unique differences in cattle. They may be all the same color, bellow the same tune and eat the same hay, but they are not the same cattle. Some have the right paperwork and some don't.

The future is not unlike crossing borders where you need to have your paperwork in order. The result is three lines. The first line is made up of those who move through quickly because they only require a nod or slight verification. The second line has all those who could get through but they do not have their paperwork in order. Tempers get heated, but paperwork takes time and the lines get long. The last group is those who are turned back because they lack the appropriate paperwork to move forward.

The sad part, there really are no large differences in cattle type, ability to perform or the owners' ability to produce high-quality calves. The only difference is how the calves are prepared for market. It is not easy, and no one is saying it is. However, in the future, the sooner the calves can be prepared, the more likely they will end up in the first line. If nothing else, that is worth peace of mind. The goal of the NDBCIA is to make things easier and less confusing.

Preprinted calving books help, so give your tag supplier a call.

May you find all your ear tags.