

BeefTalk: Prepare to Age and Source Your Calves Correctly



Get the Numbers Right - Only 56 of 67 steers correct on shipping manifest

Another glaring example of an almost missed opportunity arrived the other day. Sixty-seven head of cattle were sent to harvest. During the process, the cattle numbers were read and verified. However, the alarms sounded and people jumped when the numbers that were in the harvest process did not match the shipping manifest.

Eleven of the 67 steers were not on the manifest. This scenario is not a happy one. At a minimum, the 11 head would lose any added value when it comes to age and source verified beef and associated beef products. The 11 head put at risk all 67 steers because, in some situations, the cattle in the lot are set aside and processed as nonaged or sourced cattle.

Therefore, the added value could be lost for the entire lot. In the worst-case scenario, the cattle harvest was initiated prior to the confirmation of the manifest, so any potential increase in value is lost on all plant products that were comingled with harvested products from the nonverified cattle.

These are tragic results from a simple mistake.

The average beef producer does not always associate the failure to adequately document and verify cattle that are moving through the marketing channels with the paperwork that substantiates who the cattle are and what criteria they are trying to meet. To make matters even worse, who suffers the loss of value from a product that was comingled with a nonverified product?

These are nagging thoughts that occur when those involved in a very dynamic industry have not done their homework. Fortunately, the mistake was simple for these 11 head of calves that were age and source verified through the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association. The 11 head were listed on another shipping manifest, so they were eligible for verification as age and sourced cattle.

Get the numbers right is the lesson to be learned. This is not the first time producers and those working within the industry have had to take on additional stress through the marketing channels.

Mistakes such as this can occur. However, producers cannot afford the lost value, and having marketing opportunities smashed should not happen.

Some of the issue lies in the fact that the beef industry is cost-sensitive. Cost control or, in the best sense of the word, cost reduction, is very positive. All cattle operations must have control of their costs and apply pressure constantly to reduce costs. However, care must be taken not to turn away income for the sake of cost control.

The most striking example is the price of an ear tag or radio frequency identification button. The cost of an identification mechanism that would open additional markets is minimal. Granted, the tag is not the only cost because the application and tracking of the data bears its own cost. However, there are several opportunities for the tag to be applied and the data collected while the cattle are being handled. Even under very difficult circumstances, cattle producers have been known to apply a tag to the calf.

A tag means nothing unless the calf identification number is transferred to a database that will allow the calf to be age and source verified. Yes, the tag can be utilized for many ranch needs, such as monitoring cows and calves, sorting calves in the fall and other logistical operations.

To take the tag off the net expense side of the equation and move it to the net income side of the equation requires a producer to enter the data into one or more of the many age and source verification programs that are available in the U.S.

Now is the time, before the calves leave home, to make sure they are not limited in marketing possibilities. Every opportunity should be utilized to keep all markets open and available to increase net profit.

If an operation has not changed or modified the basic fundamental production and management plan for the enterprise to expand marketing opportunities, now is the time to do so. Make sure that all the calves are properly identified prior to leaving the ranch and that all calves meet the requirements of the selected verification program.

In addition, make sure that all the individual calf numbers are correct and match the marketing and shipping manifests that indicate which calves went where. As the new owner of high-value calves, verify that the numbers are correct prior to the final harvest.

There is no room for error.

May you find all your ear tags.