

# BeefTalk: Future of Beef Revisited

**Managerial options need to be much broader and reflective of current worldwide consumer thinking.**

By Kris Ringwall, Beef Specialist

NDSU Extension

More than a decade ago (fall of 2006), the Agricultural and Applied Economics Association published a discussion focused on the future of animal agriculture in the journal titled Choices (<http://www.choicesmagazine.org>) in Volume 21, No. 3.

Late in 2010 and early in 2011, I wrote a series of BeefTalks that reflected on the Choices publications. I thought now would be a good time to revisit the future of livestock.

One of my driving desires is to see if any noticeable change occurred. We talk and listen, but do we hear? Do we initiate change that accommodates what was the future but is now the past?

An overwhelming challenge today is the speed at which information is presented. The time to comprehend, ponder and mull data is almost nonexistent before the release of the next wave of information, minimizing or negating the information for the very person targeted to receive it. So let us ponder what did change.

The group who spearheaded the Choices effort was a publicly supported, nonprofit organization called the Farm Foundation (<https://www.farmfoundation.org>), and the breadth and depth of the undertaking was significant. The Farm Foundation still is a publicly supported, nonprofit organization that “serves as a catalyst for sound public policy by providing objective information to foster deeper understanding of issues shaping the future for agriculture, food systems and rural regions.”

The Farm Foundation partnered with private and public organizations in an effort to look ahead for the next 10 years and ponder animal agriculture. Today, the future of beef still is a concern, and considerable daily news or reports feed into the discussion.

In fact, now the discussion even has expanded into lab-based protein. Whoever would have thought that discussion was coming?

The cow herd inventory continues to fluctuate but never has reached the numbers from back when I was in college in the early 1970s. Peaks and lows in inventory still follow the cattle cycle triggered by supply and demand. Concerns are still real.

Having been to many meetings, re-meetings and re-re-meetings, the wheel tends to spin and issues surface, debate ensues, issues subside and

## Images



Published in Choices ([www.choicesmagazine.org](http://www.choicesmagazine.org)) by the American Agricultural Economics Association (Volume 21, No. 3, 2006)

**Seven Key  
Issues  
Affecting the  
Future of Beef  
Production**

then the cycle repeats. Much of what is happening is really not new.

Change is slow, and perhaps that is not all bad. I am sorry if that offends, but as we say, “The writing is on the wall.” Since the original Choices article 12 years ago, the teaching principles of cow-calf management and the syllabus have changed little. The format has changed, and classrooms express “newness” but, no, the core cattle management principles have not changed.

The real question still remains: What are we doing about it? Today, the forces that were impacting beef production 12 years ago still are at work.

We realized 12 years ago, and now as well, that, like it or not, the beef business still struggles with the breed 'em, feed 'em and eat 'em mentality. The concept that what happens on our individual operations must feed into a larger system is very engrained, almost encouraging the cow-calf producer to take a “no change” stance.

Some cow-calf producers continue to get larger, realizing that even the large systems we feed into ultimately feed into even larger systems. Who calls the “shots”? Well, that is a good question.

The need to cash flow has pushed cow-calf operations to expand. Income minus expenses is not a simple calculation; however, many production units struggle with finding the cash to keep the calculation positive. Cattle operations still monitor and struggle with expense, oftentimes narrowing their ability to survive as a viable beef operation into the future by passing by known market and efficiency management options to maintain cash.

Managerial options still need to be much broader and reflective of current worldwide consumer thinking. The 2006 Choices report identified seven issues that are fundamental to the future of beef and animal agriculture:

- Markets, structure and competition
- Value of integrated markets
- Increasing demand
- Environmental regulation and litigation
- Immigration and labor
- Animal identification and traceability systems
- Community impacts

How many of these terms still sound familiar? They all should.

Our understanding of these seven issues defines our long-term survivability. Knowing the amount of feed a beef cow eats and the sire of next year's calf is important, but the ability to produce that calf by the next generation depends on understanding these issues and tweaking them for the betterment of the beef industry.

Spend some time reading, pondering and mulling the future of beef during the next few weeks as issues will be revisited and contemplated for the betterment of our future.

May you find all your ear tags.

For more information, contact your local NDSU Extension agent (<https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/extension/directory>) or Ringwall at the Dickinson

Research Extension Center, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601; 701-456-1103; or kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu.

---


NDSU Agriculture Communication - May 17, 2018

**Source:** Kris Ringwall, 701-456-1103, kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu

**Editor:** Ellen Crawford, 701-231-5391, ellen.crawford@ndsu.edu

Attachments



PDF - Seven Key Issues Affecting the Future of Beef Production   
(NDSU\_Extension\_BeefTalk\_051718.pdf - 20.06 Kb)



EPS - Seven Key Issues Affecting the Future of Beef Production  
(NDSU\_Extension\_BeefTalk\_051718.eps - 279.50 Kb)