

BeefTalk: Say 'I Can,' Not 'I Can't'

"I can" is a much better approach to agriculture than "I can't."

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"I can."

Those two words reflect a forward-thinking attitude and an entrepreneurial spirit needed to help agricultural producers cash in on opportunities. Too often I hear, "I can't."

Producers have many reasons for negativity. Some are imposed by others, risk tolerance, cash flow, regulations, neighbors or previous generational management. The list goes on and on. The end result can be an industry comfortable with average, which limits those desiring to get in the business.

Average is not a sustainable approach. What would happen if we said, "I can"? What happens if we take ownership, stretch our business models and look for new opportunities? What happens if we grab the dollars actually available in this business? What happens if we sell \$2,000 steers at harvest? What happens if we increase marketable output by 20 percent?

Lots of "ifs" are just waiting to happen. The Dickinson Research Extension Center seeks opportunities by keeping calves, running yearlings and harvesting the yearlings after a short feedlot stay. The center cannot accomplish all that it desires, but \$2,000 steers have been good, a story that many times elicits an "I can't" response.

However, as I ponder the center's successes and failures, the challenge always is to overcome doubt with the desire of the "I can" attitude. Sometimes that means regrouping, and in the center's case, working from a smaller scale: sheep instead of cattle.

Sheep are more manageable as a harvested product. To that end, something good happened at the center as we strived to walk the maze to get to the end.

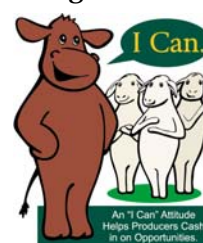
Here's a good "I can" story:

Vlad Kutka, a recent graduate from Western Washington University in Bellingham, with a bachelor of arts in Business and Sustainability and concentrations in marketing and economics, walked in and asked for some work. He came with an "I can" attitude. I pondered awhile and said, "Yes, we have a job" because the B.A. in business could help.

The center has had difficulty opening the concept of keeping calves longer, thus acquiring more of the value at the end of the production process. Honestly, the steers were just not finding the right process, and producers need to see the process through to the end. The end was not clear.

I thought, let's use the concept on the center's flock of hair sheep, which has a high percentage of White Dorper breeding. Last year, the center struggled with the lambs (just like we do with our heavy yearling

Images



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steers) and sold the lambs at \$120 per head and went home. We knew we could do better. We were frustrated with our lack of a business model.

So, in walks Kutka with a degree in business. The light came on: Let's see if we can improve our business model with lamb and learn a better model for the steers. Well, remember the \$120. This year, let's think \$400 and say "I can."

After several weeks of frustration, but progressive "I can" thinking by Kutka, the pieces started to fall into place. We found the dollars, but the dollars were not at the live market; they were at the other end of the harvest chain.

Kutka put together a model to raise and market all the center's 56 young ram lambs at harvest. His business model started with six lambs heading to harvest Oct. 10.

"We sold six animals, three as a mix of cuts, two as quarter carcasses and one as a whole carcass," he noted. "Shrunk live weight averaged 91 pounds, after approximately 15 percent shrink. Carcass weight across the whole group averaged 47.25 pounds, a yield of 52 percent of shrunk live weights."

Kutka continued, "The three processed and sold as cuts yielded just under 107 pounds of saleable product, 72.8 percent of the carcass weight."

The product sold, according to Kutka, for \$9 per pound, approximately \$315 per head. In the spirit of "I can," at \$10 or \$11, they would've brought around \$360 or \$390, respectively. Quarters sold for \$8 per pound, bringing in almost \$380 per head. At \$9 per pound, each animal would've brought in almost \$440.

"I can" is a much better approach to agriculture than "I can't." But converting the "I can" to "I did" takes lots of homework. Developing the correct business model is time-consuming, but the center increased the value of the sale product by more than threefold of the value of the product simply sold on the open market.

We can do that for beef as well. "I can." And so the story goes. The bottom line, as producers: We can get in the trap that we need to do something for everybody else and, in the process, let go of our own desires and ambitions.

In doing so, we join the industry, simply trying to keep up, always concerned we did something we should not have done. But if we "I can" our lives, and drive our operations as progressive opportunists, the spirit returns and so does joy.

May you find all your ear tags.

For more information, contact your local NDSU Extension Service 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.

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Attachments



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(NDSU_Extension_BeefTalk_102518.pdf - 414.74 Kb)



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