



BeefTalk 529: Source and Age Verification Through the Eyes of a Third-party Verifier

SUPPORTING MATERIALS



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Most coins have two sides. In fact, the old saying that there always are two sides to a story is generally true. Likewise, with many of the decisions one makes while being in the cattle business, the proper decision needs a review of both sides of the issue.

That holds true for cattle source and age verification. On one side are the producers who have cattle to source and age verify, while on the other side are the third-party verification programs. The U.S. Department of Agriculture Agricultural Marketing Service utilizes third-party verifiers to insure the claim that the cattle are source and age verified.

As a producer reviews the marketing opportunities that open up through marketing source and aged calves, understanding the process is critical. It also is in the best interest of the producer to have a good understanding of the operation that is acting as the third-party verifier.

One of the most common producer mistakes is the assumption that business will run as usual, and that source and age verification is just another one of those many programs that become part of history. Most producers are aware of the many marketing claims that may be promoted as cattle are sold, such as the calves have had all their shots, with little to no valid documentation to go with the claims.

This time, check the other side of the coin because source and age verification requires third-party assurances that the claims are true and traceable. There are several organizations that can source and age calves. Contacting each organization and becoming familiar with the process should be a priority.

As an example of a program, the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association (NDBCIA) is a third-party verifier for the USDA. The process was initiated because the NDBCIA producers already were collecting the required data. To get started, the NDBCIA reviewed the USDA Agricultural Market Service (AMS) verification program on the USDA



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website at <http://www.ams.usda.gov/AMSV1.0/>.

The steps are the same for all those who wish to become third-party verifiers. However, each program has the flexibility to define for itself how its verification process will work. For all programs, the first step is developing a process that follows the Quality Systems Verification Program's general policies and procedures. It also sometimes is referred to as the ARC 1001 procedure.

For the NDBCIA, the end result was the CalfAID program. The program was designed to provide independent verification for the source and age verification of the calves that were enrolled in NDBCIA programs. Some insight from behind the scenes always is helpful to understand both sides of a coin, which, in this case, is the process of source and aging calves.

Some parts of the program are the responsibility of the producer, some the third-party verifier and others are a combination of both. In the case of the CalfAID program, as well as other programs, a producer simply needs to contact the third-party verifier to apply for its services.

The verifier will outline the required steps that are needed. Once one applies to the program and is accepted, the producer will be provided with and expected to complete the various steps. Perhaps the most frustration in being a third-party verifier is the tendency for producers either to assume that those doing the verification already know the answers and therefore it is all right to skip parts of the documentation or the producer would like to sign up for third-party verification as the cattle are being loaded for sale.

Both points are critical. All the information needs to be furnished and kept regardless of the marketing urgency because the process takes time. So please, as marketing plans are being made, incorporate enough time into the plan to apply to a third-party verifier.

As noted in all the AMS publications, third-party verification is based on user fees and voluntary participation. For some, the marketing rewards make the effort well worth it. For others, there may be no incentive to go through the effort to have calves source and aged verified. Ask around first so one can make a well-informed decision.

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.

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