



BeefTalk 536: The Future of Beef II

SUPPORTING MATERIALS

Seven Key Issues Affecting the Future of Beef Production

1. Markets, Structure and Competition
2. Value in Integrated Markets
3. Increasing Demand
4. Environmental Regulation and Litigation
5. Immigration and Labor
6. Animal Identification and Traceability Systems
7. Community Impacts.

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

The Farm Foundation partnered with private and public organizations to look ahead for the next 10 years and ponder what animal agriculture will be like.

If the future of beef is a concern, and it certainly seems to be, based on the numerous reports on the decreasing cow herd, then who really is concerned? Having been to many meetings and then repeats of these meetings and actually repeats of the repeat meetings, the wheel tends to spin and issues surface, debate ensues, issues subside and then the cycle repeats itself.

Much of what is happening is not news. I am sorry if that

offends someone. However, as we say, “the writing is on the wall.” We simply do not read it, or we may read it and just ignore it. Again, I am sorry if that offends someone.

In the fall of 2006, the American Agricultural Economics Association published a discussion in its Choices journal (<http://www.choicesmagazine.org>) an article titled “The Future of Animal Agriculture in North America” (Volume 21, No. 3, 2006). The discussion focused on the future of animal agriculture.

Apparently the news was hard to grasp, but beef cows and their future were at the heart of the discussion. The following will be a post-publishing look at that discussion four years later. I also will talk about the article in future BeefTalk columns.

“What are we doing about the article?” is the question that remains. The group that spearheaded the effort is a publicly supported, nonprofit organization called the Farm Foundation (<http://www.farmfoundation.org>). The breadth and depth of the undertaking was significant. The Farm Foundation “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 to look ahead for the next 10 years and ponder what animal agriculture will be like. Four years later, we are more than halfway through the period they would have envisioned when the foundation started its endeavor.



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Forces that were impacting beef production then still are at work today. We realized back then and today that the beef business no longer is a breedem, feedem and eatem industry, even if we don't like it.

Much that happens in individual operations must feed into a larger system. Even the large systems ultimately feed into even larger systems. The ability to cash flow may be very local, but it still is income minus expenses. However, the issues surrounding the ability to survive as a viable beef operation in the future need to be much broader.

This breadth is not our desired breadth, but rather the breadth that consumers are willing to divulge in their consumerism. The Choices magazine discussion identified issues that are fundamental to the future of beef and all of animal agriculture. Many of the issues continue to gather sides. Significant, if not quite vocal, points and counterpoints still are heard by all of us four years later.

The seven identified issues were markets, structure and competition; value in integrated markets; increasing demand; environmental regulation and litigation; immigration and labor; animal identification and traceability systems; and community impacts. How many of these terms still sound familiar today?

In reality, they all do, and our long-term survival depends on our understanding of all seven issues. Yes, the amount of feed a beef cow eats is important and so is the sire of next year's calf. However, 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. I say understanding, not outcome, because the actual outcome may or may not be what we want or perceive.

Regardless, the future "structure" that we raise beef cattle under is contained in these issues. That is why the report is titled "The Future of Animal Agriculture in North America."

During the next few weeks, each of these issues will be revisited, reviewed and contemplated with the hope that our future will be better in the beef industry.

The downward trend in the beef business is real. We can continue to evaluate charts and trends. However, we must do something as well. That something involves us and those around us understanding the real facts and, in a united way, joining hands to help each another.

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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