



BeefTalk 627: May You Find All Your Ear Tags

SUPPORTING MATERIALS



Age- and source-verification programs continue to be an important part of marketing cattle.

As fall markets prepare to receive the current calf crop as it comes off the cow, producers initiate late-summer and fall roundups in what becomes an annual, well-planned exercise that repeats every year.

This rhythmic exercise becomes quite historic and predictable. That is good, but a note of caution certainly is

advised. The BeefTalk column always ends with: "May you find all your ear tags." Some appreciate the note and others do not.

Some producers meticulously account for every calf by individual ear tag number, even to the extent of expressing individual anxiety if a particular number is not present. In contrast, some producers display considerable anxiety when the concept of individual ear tags even is discussed.

With that being said, it is important to note that all beef producers market into the same marketing pool, which is the consumer. This consumer may be local, regional, national or international. Nevertheless, beef is consumed.

The North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association (NDBCIA) has managed individual cattle ear tags for years, while the producers manage the cattle. The NDBCIA has expanded the management of ear tags by adding age and source verification.

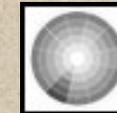
That process, at least for the NDBCIA, is called CalfAid. The program is reviewed and certified by the Agricultural Marketing Service in the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The NDBCIA is audited annually and certainly keeps updated with what is happening in the industry.

Thus, the note of caution as producers began to sell cattle this fall. Age- and source-verification programs continue to be an important part of marketing cattle. Although the speeches and exciting proposals for marketing age and sourced calves no longer are big news items, the desire and the need to know where cattle come from and, in many cases, how old the cattle are, still is active.

Each program, in its own right, is effective and serves a very good purpose. However, here lies the note of caution.



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Age and/or source verification regulated and impeccable programs are used to verify to the letter what is being offered in the market and to the consumer. There is no room for error.

Therefore, as producers, care needs to be taken as to what one is certifying. It is not unusual for a late afternoon call to the NDBCIA office from a feedlot verifying individual calf numbers. The feedlot may have received or will be shipping soon a lot of cattle that will be going into an age and source or other identity-preserved program.

The programs vary tremendously in what genetic or management practices they are marketing. However, the question is always the same: "who is this calf?"

Recently, a feedlot was tracking down some calves and made the comment that the calves only needed to fit the defined group date of birth, so the individual birth dates did not matter. That is a true statement because cattle are group or pen marketed.

However, the programs require that someone certifies that the individual calves that make up the group are indeed the individual calves that were produced on the ranch. There is no room for error or approximately correct numbers. The calves must be correct.

Recently, the consequence of signing group forms and certifying that the forms are correct when, in fact, the forms were not correct was in the news. Although the example is not about cattle, the same message is true. The North Dakota attorney general and the North Dakota secretary of state recently noted in a news release that "the criminal complaints allege that each of the circulators of a petition are required to sign an affidavit stating they witnessed all the signatures and that all the signatures are genuine. However, the investigation found that the statements were not correct and that many of the individuals whose signatures appeared on the petitions had not, in fact, signed them." Individuals are being charged.

Likewise, when producers sign an affidavit stating the genetics and management practices meet a particular marketing protocol, producers are stating they know and can attest that every calf meets the requirements of the program. As in the case of filing petition signatures, it does not count that the majority of the signatures were valid. All the signatures must be valid.

When selling calves with the potential of comingling with other calves, it is wise to have calves individually identified and recorded.

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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