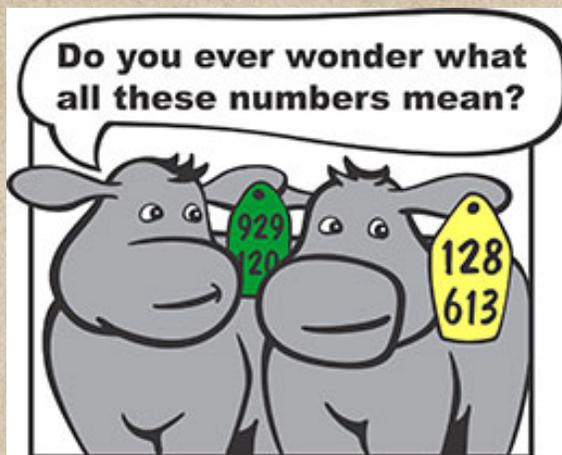




BeefTalk 721: Unified Cattle Identification Remains an Elusive Goal

SUPPORTING MATERIALS



As with most issues without resolve, the discussion will come and go.

Cattle values are vulnerable to issues that surface within the consuming public even though discussions on animal identification have been soft for some time.

As cattle producers, occasional reminders are needed to prod us into not forgetting the industry's susceptibility or vulnerability to unforeseen biosecurity issues. As with most issues without resolve, the discussion will come and go. Have the pros and cons changed? Probably not, but the state of seamless animal identification still remains a goal rather than an outcome.

Ironically, the cow-calf business is good. Expenses may be going up, but the value of the product is holding well.

Also, with the decreased numbers of cows available, supplies become tighter, which benefits the producer. However, producers need to remain vigilant. As the dollar value in the beef business increases, the need to protect that growth does not go away.

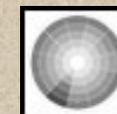
In a broad sense, people purchase insurance to cover unexpected losses. Those losses could be physical or value-related. Insurance to protect assets comes in many forms. Fire, wind, snow, water or many other natural events can wreak havoc on cattle herds. But there is one darker, very sinister risk, which is the introduction of a significant biohazard that is commonly referred to as a disease issue.

The capacity to seek out the culprit needs to be quick and thorough. No potential carriers can be left for later re-infection. This means the capacity to track cattle needs to be present. Those cattle that have been in contact with infected herds and have traveled to other locations need to be found. Despite years of committee work and opinions, nothing really has changed. Granted, laboratory efforts involving DNA or other sleuthing techniques have surfaced, but practicality is still remote.

The bottom line remains: If animals are assigned a unique number and maintain that number for life, the potential to



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track a disease is enhanced if an appropriate program is available. Thus the individual number is one aspect of animal identification, but the system or process that the number is used with is equally important.

The concept of a large database that can record and process animal identifications remains an elusive objective. Why these thoughts today? There has not been any recent issue regarding animal identification. However, even within the voluntary programs that are operational in the beef business, change is inevitable.

The North Dakota State University Extension Service is undertaking the task of updating the cow herd appraisal of performance software (CHAPS) that has been utilized through the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association since 1985. The program originally was utilized to update the old record base that was started in 1963.

The change resulted from the need to move from the cumbersome portability of mainframe computers to the more streamlined personal computers that were being introduced to the marketplace.

That was quite a change because the initial computer CHAPS reports produced from the submitted data would be set up late in the afternoon and then the program ran all night just to generate one herd report. The newer computers could do that process in minutes, if not seconds.

However, the world changed and so has the computing world. The change has been continual, so we have data programs fighting for survival as new programs with more bells and whistles emerge.

Unfortunately, as the computing world changes, the cow has not. As the CHAPS reprogramming process engages those involved in the world of beef records, simultaneously a new wave of computer programmers writing the program are at the helm.

However, some things have not changed because some of the questions are the same. For example: What is a cattle identification number? The same question always has nagged the broader efforts of establishing a national animal identification number.

What is the number? How long should the number be? Is the number only numeric or can alpha characters be used? Can the alpha characters be imbedded anywhere within the number? Should certain information be imbedded within the number? What about dashes or pluses or other symbols? Should you be able to scan the number and/or have it be readable? Should breed codes be part of the number or separate? Can sire and dam information be part of the number?

Every time one thinks of all the questions, one comes to understand the difficulty the industry has in establishing a national cattle identification program.

Maybe someday?

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.

