

Remember the Black Cow You Purchased Back in '04?

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The practice of identifying cattle has been around for a long time. It is a simple concept: place a tag in the ear, create some sort of record associated with the number on the tag and the animal is now individually identified.

The impact of cattle identification, that little tag placed in the ear of a calf, cow or bull, has all sorts of possibilities. Those possibilities, however, require diligence in keeping track of inventory.

Last month, staff at the North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension Center were busy sorting, culling, selling and buying replacement heifers. The Center maintains individual identification of the entire inventory. Three individuals (part time) help keep the numbers true and correct, at least to the extent possible.

The identification system allows the center to follow the shifts in inventory. Every animal sold has an ID and every animal brought in receives one. The ID system and its importance was the object of some discussion when we shifted inventory and settled on a uniform set of replacement heifers.

Each year after the annual fall placement of steers into the feedlot, our staff works on the annual crop of heifers. This year, 55 heifers were selected for retention in the herd and 74 were marked to sell as replacement heifers. All the heifers are branded with the center's brand, "Bangs" vaccinated, tattooed, and tagged. All carry a steel metal individual tag and a plastic visual tag.

We buy heifers, primarily to add uniformity in weight, as all the heifers are used in research trials. (This year's trial involves nutrient management.) Shortly after shipping, the retained heifers were worked, and heifer N3057 was not here, but N3148 was. Apparently, there was a slip of the cutting gate, a tag was incorrectly read, or someone just messed up. Since the mistake is not correctable at this point, the inventory is changed (a trading point).

The 58 purchased heifers are delivered to the ranch, providing the crew the luxury of selecting 100 heifers out of the 113 head available for the trial. The heifers aver-

aged 742 pounds and were an excellent set.

The heifers were branded, assigned a new ranch number, the former owner's individual calf number recorded, and all available data tracked down and noted. All retained heifers are also given an electronic ID (EID). This would obviously include the original source of the cattle.

Of the 58 purchased heifers, one turned out to be a steer. Fourteen had no data available other than the source and seven had no original ranch tag. Of the seven, six had an individual brucellosis "Bangs" tag, one heifer had no tags at all. Because we only needed 100 heifers, 12 of the heifers with no data plus the steer will be resold.

Here lies an interesting scenario. These 12 heifers could likely be purchased as a good set of black heifers, added to a development group and resold as a very uniform set of bred heifers this fall. Until they are harvested over the next 10-20 years, they will carry the Center's brand. These same heifers may carry the assigned ranch ID number, the "Bangs" tattoo and the metal "Bangs" tag for their productive life. And yes, they could have an electronic tag added as well.

Because those heifers spent roughly 30 days here, (Jan. 22 until mid February), the Center will forever be part of their history. If 15 years from now, one of these animals is traced, someone will be asked, do you remember EID 0949000000149622? Here, let me give you what I can read of her "Bangs" tattoo. Oh, by the way she was black?

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at www.BeefTalk.com. For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to www.CHAPS2000.com on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0182.

Ear Tag Status of Purchased Yearlings

NDSU Dickinson Research Extension Center

Number purchased	58
Number with individual ear tags	51
Number with traceable data	44