

\$20 per calf covers identification, data management and traceback

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This is a big week for the Dickinson Research Extension Center (DREC). The center is involved in several projects that connect the beef cow to the final evaluation of the steer in the feedlot.

When the DREC started pressing the issue of connectivity between the management of a calf from nursing to backgrounding and feedlot performance, some in the industry had a ho-hum opinion. A common belief was that calf markets make any adjustments needed. These market adjustments would place most calves on a level playing field as they enter the feedlot. The essence of that argument is true; calves doing poorly should bring less money than calves doing well.

As the industry has turned its attention toward the perpetual tracking of cattle, the interest has increased, particularly when claims of performance and herd health now can become traceable. For the 2004 calf crop, five projects traced calves all the way to the rail.

These projects included the effect of early versus normal weaning of calves, the impact of introducing Loala cattle on yearling steer performance, the effect of adding 25 percent barley grain versus barley hay in a base ration of barley/pea haylage, the impact of grazing systems on steer feedlot performance and the effect of feeding field peas in combination with flaxseed on overall steer performance following weaning.

So why the big-week talk? Well, all the cattle lots placed on feed last year will have final closeouts this week.

The center had six lots of cattle on feed this year. Lot 4359, with 30 early-weaned steer calves, went on feed on Oct. 12, 2004. Lots 4424 and 4425, with 23 head of grazing system and 22 Loala yearling steer calves respectively, went on feed Nov. 5. Lot 4528, with 72 steer calves, was involved in the barley effort and went on feed Dec. 10. Lot 4557, with 64 steer calves, was fed field peas and flaxseed and put on feed Dec. 22. Lot 4562 included 28 normal-weaned steer calves that went on feed Dec. 30.

The first lot to close was lot 4425, netting a positive \$74 with no death loss. The second lot to close was lot 4359, netting a negative \$57.41 per head with a death loss of two out of the 30 calves. The remaining four lots of 187 steers are scheduled to close this week. Lots 4424, 4557 and 4562 had no death loss. Lot 4528 had three dead steers. This will close the 2004 crop of 239 steers the center retained ownership of this year.

Because the six lots of steers all were utilized in the center's research, the center's efforts to track cattle also utilized all the calves. All 239 calves were traced, tracked and delivered to the packer with all the appropriate documentation. All the data was recovered and returned to the center through the feed yard. The only glitch was the removal of all the center's electronic identification tags (EID) and replacing them with the feed yard's electronic tags. This pointed to the futility of the EID placement by the center; however, the data was not compromised.

The center's estimates on the cost of tracking is \$5 for the price of the tag, data management and verification, \$7 for the cost of working the calves at preweaning or weaning to place and document an electronic identification tag and \$8 for the cost of electronic data management at the feed yard. If you add up the numbers, the center paid \$20 a head for identification, data management and traceback of the center's 2004 steer calves from conception to the rail.

May you find all your NAIS-approved 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 BT0255.

Identification, Data Management and Traceback Cost Estimates for 2004 DREC Steer Calves

Tag, data management and verification	\$5
Calf working, tag placement and documentation of EID tag	\$7
Feedlot and packer electronic data management	\$8
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Total per calf cost	\$20