

Thinking is more important than talking

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The North Dakota Stockmen's Association just finished its annual meeting. This annual gathering of cattle producers and those associated with the industry is always a good event.

The Dickinson Research Extension Center was notable to participate in all of the events, but we were able to help with the Friday evening meal. All must have enjoyed the meal because the stew kettles returned to the kitchen empty.

The menu was simple, four stews and an assortment of breads. Paul Berg from the North Dakota State University Animal and Range Sciences Department headed up the cooking crew. Travis Maddock and fellow NDSU graduate students assisted him. Beef, as the old saying goes, was for dinner. There was no need to pile on the extras.

In addition to providing some excellent beef and the associated service with sponsoring a meal, we took the opportunity to have some fun while encouraging everyone to think, at least a little bit.

Entrance to the feast was guarded. The entrances were all secured with a multitude of electronic scanning devices. Actual participation required everyone to be identified with a radio frequency identification tag, commonly called an EID, which is short for electronic identification.

Upon tagging, the EID was scanned into a database. Each individual's gender, date of birth and place of birth was recorded. All participants were thus EID source and age verified. The process went along at a reasonable pace, with four lines moving simultaneously. While not everyone was cooperative, all who were there to eat were tagged. There may have been a few holdouts at the end who slipped in and grabbed some stew, but we will catch them at the next scanning event.

The participants were tagged with low-frequency, half- or full-duplex tags and given a neck chain with a tag representing the world of high-frequency tags. Brand inspectors, equipped with hand-held readers, moved throughout the crowd reading the low-frequency tags. Engineers from NDSU's Center for Nanoscale Science and Engineering and the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering were on hand to scan the high-frequency

tags as participants enjoyed an evening of stew.

The process was relatively uneventful, but certainly placed the issue of electronic identification front and center with producers. Positive and negative comments about identification were overheard. What do you need "this" for? Now you're going to track everything I do! I suppose you will zap me while I am sleeping tonight! Why do you want to know "that"? Why do I get a white tag and he gets a yellow tag? What is the difference between the tags?

In retrospect, the event pointed out the need to stay focused on the issues. We already know that not all technology works as we would like. Working with cooperative and even some uncooperative people in the comfort of a motel is simpler than working bawling cattle exposed to the elements.

While technology works, not all of the applications expected of the technology do. Every twist brings new insight and every new environment brings new headaches. Expected outcomes and reality often are distinctly different.

The world changes every day. The world that business existed in yesterday is not the same world that business will exist in tomorrow. The beef business is no different.

Today, in the beef industry, tags are real. Tags are coming, but how they will be used is only a thought. The simultaneous existence of your thoughts, my thoughts and all thoughts are real.

Many questions crop up during discussions about animal identification. The answers are unknown, but the questions are real. It is important to continue thinking because maybe, just maybe, tomorrow's business will be your business.

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 BT0267.

TOP 10

Comments from the North Dakota Stockmen's Association members as they were tagged with an Electronic Identification tag, scanned into a database and each individual's gender, date of birth and place of birth was recorded.

1. What do you need "this" for?
2. Now you're going to track everything I do!
3. I suppose you will zap me while I am sleeping tonight!
4. Why do you want to know "that"?
5. What kind of tags are these?
6. What are you doing?
7. What does that record?
8. Is that the right weight?
9. Why do I get a white tag and he gets a yellow tag?
10. What is the difference between the tags?