

## Change Is Slow, But It Is Coming

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Fall is here, but the question of the day remains. As the calves are processed for shipping, is placing electronic identification tags (EIDs) worth it? This is a good, honest question, but the answer still is kind of soft.

Positive thoughts and actions are occurring in the beef industry. The North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension Center has placed EIDs in calves since 2004. In 2004, 5,170 calves were tagged with EIDs. In 2005, 2,112 calves were tagged and 7,150 calves were tagged with EIDs in 2006.

Data shows there is some light at the end of the tunnel. After three years, there are early indications that demonstrate a change in how the industry views a tagged calf.

When the DREC started tagging in 2004, almost half of the tags (49.77 percent) were cut out or simply not retrieved at slaughter. In 2005, things did not get any better; in fact, they got worse. For those calves, 67.57 percent of the data was lost or not retrieved at slaughter.

Only one producer had a success story. For that producer, all of the calves were identified through slaughter. For the other producers, the majority, if not all of the calves, had their tags cut out at the feedlot.

But things are looking better for those calves that were tagged in 2006. Currently, only 13.68 percent of the calves have officially lost their tags at the backgrounding lot, the feedlot or during slaughter. Still, some calf buyers are cutting out the tags or disregarding the tags, but some are starting to ask real questions.

Instead of being the exception to the process, a favorable acknowledgement that the tag may have a purpose has been acknowledged as the backgrounders and feedlots receive the calves and allow the tag to remain in the ear. Even more exciting is the fact that some producers actually are seeing slaughter data returning on the calves they tagged.

One producer tagged 363 calves during fall 2004. The North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Associa-

tion (NDBCIA) was able to track and provide the producer with data on 159 calves (43 percent) of the tagged animals. Actually, that was a good number for 2004. In 2005, the producer tagged 374 calves. The NDBCIA was able to get carcass data on 268 calves, or just more than 71 percent of the tagged calves. That was better.

The producer tagged 362 calves during fall 2006. To date, none of the calves have lost their tags. Only 66 have been slaughtered and the rest remain in the feedlot. Time will tell because things can happen that prevent the collection of carcass data. One thing is for sure: People along the way finally are talking, asking questions and trying. They are trying to make things work.

Producers are spending a little more time getting their calving data (the calving book) in order prior to selling calves. Sale barns are reaching out and asking how these calves can be sold along with their identity.

Backgrounders and feedlots are setting aside the tag cutters and allowing cooperative activities. This cooperation involves calves that no longer are owned by the producer of the calves. The backgrounders and feedlots are providing assistance by communicating a desire for information along the processing chain, ultimately facilitating data collection for the good of all.

The bottom line is that producers, marketing agencies, backgrounders, feedlots and packers are opening up to communicating. They are communicating with each other, which ultimately will impact the beef industry.

Times are changing, even if change comes at a relatively low rate of speed.

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 Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to <http://www.CHAPS2000.com> on the Internet.

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# **Lost EID Tags**

**North Dakota Beef Cattle  
Improvement Association**

2004 calves — 50% lost tags

2005 calves — 68% lost tags

2006 calves — 14% lost tags