

## Our Story

The western North Dakota economy and community of residents was developed from agriculture. There have been other important elements over time including coal mining, oil production, and supporting community service businesses as well as schools, hospitals, and churches.

The landscape is open and vast marked by farmed fields, pastured grasslands, and broken up by wetlands (sloughs), patches of wasteland, and wildlife set aside parcels. Rural homes and farming sites are scattered about marked with buildings, grain storage and shelterbelt plantings of trees on the almost treeless plains connected by a series of gravel and paved surface roads and power lines to the few small towns of clustered homes, a main street of business, and community centers.

Agriculture is dominated by: the annual seasonal planting of about a half a dozen different crops, the harvest as the summer season wanes to fall and the subsequent movement and shipment of grain out by truck and rail. By historical measures, the family operated farms have become big small businesses in terms of the amount of investment in equipment, land, and operating expenses involved with the scale to provide for a families living. Work ethic, business aptness, and innovation prevail amongst heritage and compassion.

Completing the picture is the production of livestock, primarily cattle, making use of land not suitable for profitable farming and creating economic value of resources of little alternative use. Tracts of unbroken native grasslands and parcels of marginal once farmed lands returned to grass are fenced and grazed by cattle in season. Grasses and forage-able plants are harvested as hay from waste and wetlands and supplemented with cropping by-products and aftermath, some limited feed crops grown in rotation with cash grains, and other feedstuff of little alternative value for winter feed.

Cattle producers in the ag mix are essentially cow calf producers. They summer breed cows for spring calving and market partially grown feeder calves in the fall and early winter. Herd sizes are dictated by a balance of available grazing acreage and forage for winter feed in an environment of variable climate and production. The cycle of breeding, calving, pasturing, winter feeding, and shipping has gone sustainably on for several generations. Profits are variable, influenced by factors beyond the farm gate; but, tied to care of the stock to keep them healthily, nourished, and productive.

Cows are cows. They are content as long as they can keep their bellies full, cluster as herd out of the winter storms and wind, raise their calf, and not be threatened and stressed with too many things that disrupt their eating, resting, ambling about patterns. They are fairly adaptable and can be handled with a minimal stress to gather, trailer to pasture, work through an alley and chute (to receive vaccinations, ID'd, health and pregnancy testing) and confined to protected sheltered areas for winter feeding.

Amongst the country side cattle seem a natural and contributing element of the system. They graze and feed on plants of little other use and when appropriately managed for the long haul help maintain the land, the cover, and the coexisting wildlife. Deer, waterfowl, upland birds, coyotes, fox, rabbits, raccoons, gophers, etc are a part of the daily experience for those working the land. Manure deposited on the landscape contributes to the natural cycle of soil and life. Water consumed for daily needs comes from pumped ground water and pooled surface water. Care and concern over pollution and protection in our setting can easily be exaggerated.

Producers that raise cattle are a bit unique. They are a minority that choose to be involved with livestock for more than solely economic reasons. They like cattle and find some reward in the hard work and pride of caring and raising quality stock. They understand cattle behavior and their physical needs allowing them some pleasure in working and caring for them and certainly try hard to be profitable so that they might continue doing what they do. They eat and enjoy meat and beef they raise believing it to be a nutritionally high value component of a diet and a morally responsible thing to do.

Most cattle producers are busy people occupied in doing what they do, their business, and not wrapped up in trying to dictate to others how and what to do. They and their existence out on the prairie and farmland in North Dakota is easily, more frequently, and unjustly threatened when the livestock industry gets painted with a broad brush with so many outrageous claims associated with animal abuse, environmental degradation, and nutritional disease. Often repeated propaganda easily becomes people's perception and paradigm even when it goes beyond common sense.

Most of today's population is far removed from the day to day and generation to generation realities of agriculture. Hopefully our story will be heard and appreciated for what it is.