Smart Beef Production

The Situation
North Dakota beef producers traditionally sell their calf crop in the fall of the year, marketing the calves at a local sale barn or selling direct to feedlot buyers. Some producers background their calf crop. Fewer producers use their calves in a traditional yearling program and even less retain ownership into the feedlot. The revenue stream ends when producers sell their calves but there is economic opportunity all the way to the harvest floor.

A coordinated Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) multi-year study at the NDSU Dickinson Research Extension Center (DREC) has identified methods and practices that offer alternative management strategies to improve producer income, cut input costs and grow North Dakota’s economy.

Extension Response
Educational efforts have included in-service training for Extension Agents and producer seminars regarding alternative management methods that focus on three outcomes:

1. Develop annual crop rotations that improve soil health and crop yields, decrease input costs and increase forage production.
2. Utilize annual crop rotations to diversify farm and ranch crop production economic platforms.
3. Shift to lower input cattle production systems that include May-June calving to decrease costs and spring weather related death loss.

Educational presentations where developed and distributed to area and county Extension Agents for use in their educational programming. Gradual implementation is anticipated.

Impacts
There is a dual advantage for producers. The implementation of the annual crop rotations and cropping systems can lower costs and at the same time, provide increased forage for animal use. Additional beef production of over 700 pounds per animal translates directly into increased opportunity for producers.

Feedback
Producers who see the annual crop rotations and cropping systems data are seeing a benefit. First, as commodity prices fluctuate, costs are contained. Second, greater forage production occurs through the diversity of crops and livestock. Finally, producers have seen overall livestock opportunity enhanced.

Public Value Statement
North Dakota’s rural economy has the opportunity to add value to 420,360 steer calves or 297,614,880 pounds of beef.

Primary Contact
Kris A. Ringwall, Ph. D
NDSU Extension Livestock Specialist
1041 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601
701-456-1103, kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu