

May 4, 2011

**A LITTLE BIT COUNTRY
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Once in a Lifetime

Mother Nature has given us North Dakotans a lot of good times but once in a while she lets us know who is actually in control. Such was the case this past weekend when she added more snow to our 100 year plus record along with a blast of 60-70 mph winds that seemed to last for an eternity.

My first memory of a North Dakota winter blizzard goes back to 1951. Yes, I was very small but I do remember helping Mon and Dad digging steps in some very high snow banks. Then there was the March 6, 1966 snowstorm which spread across the southern part of the state causing huge livestock losses. At the time I was a student at NDSU. The following weekend I went home and saw many adult cows dead, stuck in the snow along the highway. They were all moving in a southerly direction with the wind. It was speculated they suffocated from the ice and snow build-up around their nostrils. Back then it was common for ranchers to start calving around April 1 so losses of baby calves were minimal. I think this was the same storm when my high school coach and his assistants were forced to burn the interior of their car to avoid freezing.

All storms seem to be a little different from the others. Fortunately the temperature last Saturday was near 32 degrees F. However, the wind velocity along with the blowing snow was something I had never experienced. My first trip to the barn was scary. Although it is only about 500 feet from the house, I did have some thoughts about becoming exhausted trying to cross snow drifts where snow drifts have never been. The four animals left in the barn the previous night were comfortable although snow had drifted into it through an open door. My first effort was to close the sliding door. It was closed only about three feet as the channel on which the door rolled was clogged with small birds seeking sanctuary from the snow. So, now

my attention focused on the cow left outside. She had lost her calf a week earlier so there was no need to put her in the barn. Besides, the narrow pen she was in has an east-west windbreak which has given adequate protection from the worst of winter storms of the past fifteen years. Occasionally, I would catch a glimpse of what looked like the cow's head. It appeared to move slightly as if to shake off snow. However, I could not see any other part of her body. It appeared she soon would be covered with snow so I went for a shovel. It did not take long to realize this attempt was futile and my only recourse was to hope for a miracle. Such did happen when the windbreak tore from the anchoring posts. This enabled the wind to pick up snow on the right side of the cow and by late afternoon the wind slowed just enough to allow me to dig a trench to free the cow. She did not hesitate to jump through the trench. When she reached the barn she immediately turned around to look at where she came from and maybe say "thank you".

Although this cow survived, I am certain most producers in the storm area will have losses. Early reports indicate a wide range of storm related deaths. I want to use some space to inform producers they are likely eligible for the Livestock Indemnity Program (LIP). This is part of the "Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008" which provides benefits to livestock producers for deaths in excess of normal mortality caused by adverse weather such as blizzards and extreme cold.

There are several requirements for LIP eligibility. A notice of loss and an application for payment must be submitted to the local FSA service center within 30 days of when the loss of livestock was apparent to the producer. Beef, dairy, sheep, goats and equine are among the 16 animal species qualifying for LIP.

All of us, who have lived in North Dakota for even just a small time, will have memories of winter blizzards. For me the blizzard of April 30, 2011, will be forever etched in my mind. I never thought the wind could blow so hard for so long. Hopefully, it will be a once in a lifetime experience.