



Beef Talk

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Be careful when signing

Too often in the beef cattle industry, producers slip into the business-as-usual mode, and life moves forward. That penchant for the status quo, however, is about to end. The future for beef cattle production is no longer going to be business as usual.

Case in point

The current case in point is documentation of the source and age of calves. A common response as cattle are sold is to add the phrase “source- and age-verified.” A few words can mean a lot, or, if not appropriately stated, can imply more than what actually can be verified. To verify something, according to *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary*, means to confirm or substantiate in law by oath, or to establish the truth, accuracy or reality of the stated fact.

When held to specific requirements, a common approach is to audit the data that is in use to substantiate the verifiable event. An audit, again according to Webster’s, is a formal examination of an organization or individual’s accounts or financial situation, or a methodical examination and review.

These are not words to take lightly. The typical action in today’s markets, in preparation for future source- and age-verification requirements, is to ask for a form of animal identification (ID). This verification can include an electronic ID (EID) tag, a premises ID number or a 911 emergency response address, plus an assurance of written records substantiating

source and birth data for the calves being sold. This information also should be placed in a working national database, along with permission to access the data by the cattle buyers.

Given the historical appreciation of stated facts within the concept of selling cattle, claims may have been made. These claims are ignored due to the inability to substantiate the claim. Often-repeated sales lingo is that “the calves have all their shots.” In reality, this phrase means nothing because the buyer generally revaccinates newly arrived cattle to assure the calves are vaccinated.

Seller accountability throughout the marketing process never existed. The net result was a tendency to speak prior to thinking, and the words may have stretched the truth on some groups of sale calves.

Changes ahead

The cattle business is not going to be the same. These new processes involving the transfer of ownership are increasingly connecting the ability to verify statements made at the time of sale back to the cow-calf producer. Furthermore, subsequent sale of the calves does not release the cow-calf

producer from the original claim, in this case source and age verification. The caution is simply this: Don’t state cattle can be source- and age-verified unless the statement can be substantiated by records. These records need to be auditable.

The effect on cow-calf producers is that, upon request, a producer will need to provide the required records to verify that an individual calf was in fact born at a certain location on a certain date within the operation. A simple notation on a calendar or in a notebook is a stretch, especially when a producer is asked to state unequivocally several months after a sale that a particular calf in question actually is the calf that was born within the operation and within a certain range of calving dates.

The answer to the question of source and age verification, at least in an auditable sense, implies the keeping of accurate cattle inventories within the operation. These inventories must be accessible and the cattle traceable. Yes, the mere fact the calf was identified individually implies the producer knows and can prove the answer to the question. Can your customers?

For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association (NDBCIA), 1133 State Ave., Dickinson, N.D. 58601, or go to www.chaps2000.com. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0258.

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A Few Words Can Mean a Lot

Are your calves truly age- and source-verified?

ver-i-fy \ver-ə-'lī-ə- or -'lī-ēd; -fī-ŋg [ME *verifien*, fr. MF *verifier*, fr. ML *verificare*, fr. L *versus* true more at VERY] **1**: to confirm or substantiate in law by oath **2**: to establish the truth, accuracy, or reality of

Would your records withstand an audit?

au-dit \əd-ə-'tī-ə- [MF, fr. L *auditus* act of hearing, fr. *auditus*, pp.] **1 a**: a formal or official examination and verification of an account book **b**: a methodical examination and review **2**: the final report of an examination of books of account by auditors **au-dit-able** \ə-'dīt-ə-bəl/

Source: Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary.

Editor’s Note: Addressing the past, present and future state of the beef cattle business, “Beef Talk” is a weekly column distributed by the North Dakota State University (NDSU) Agricultural Communication office. Ringwall is executive secretary of the NDBCIA, director of the Dickinson Research Extension Center and an NDSU Extension livestock specialist. An archive of columns can be found at www.beef-talk.com, and your comments are always welcome.