



# Beef Talk

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## Don't forget, every good rose has good thorns

Occasionally a lesson in life needs to be learned. That lesson may not always be wanted or desired, but the need to learn the lesson is real.

A common life example is grabbing a hot iron. Your hand will be burned and you will know not to grab anything that is hot. Likewise, if you desire a drink of water outside when it is below freezing, the water will be frozen. One quickly learns that if a drink of cool water is needed, the appropriate temperature must be met.

Lessons carry with them a process of sorting the good from the bad and the bad from the good. That is where the livestock industry is at when reviewing the past, present and future of age and source verification or verification of other attributes. The other attributes could be country-of-origin labeling (often referred to as COL or COOL) or various production practices utilized during the production lifetime and processing of an animal destined to go into the food chain.

In the end, the food item generated will have a tag that contains only information

that can be verified by an appropriate and authentic process. What is the lesson? In simple terms, producers need to learn not to be so thick-skinned that they are blinded to the potential of the future.

### Life lessons

Such are the obvious lessons of life. For today, that lesson is as difficult as knowing the difference between being too thick-skinned and too thin-skinned. Like all walks of life, producing beef has its ups and downs. However, long-term survival means rolling over the good and bad times and making the best of what is.

Agricultural people in general, and beef producers specifically, are good at that and in the process have developed a relatively thick skin. If one ever questions that, just go on a handshaking expedition. Not only have agricultural people become thick-skinned in the attitude department, their hands also are rough and tough.

As one strolls through the various industry departments that integrate with

agriculture, one finds that the people there have softer hands. The further one gets from production agriculture, the softer the hands become. Probably the only exception is the dairy producer, who has learned the secret of good udder balm.

### Thorns

In agriculture, as in many industries, those who survive tend to be thick-skinned. So what is the lesson? There is a point where producers need to re-evaluate and ask themselves if they have become too thick-skinned and are buffering themselves from inevitable change. The lesson one needs to learn is that change occurs as a reaction to two forces. These forces generally are opposed to each other, although both forces can exist simultaneously within an industry.

For example, age and source verification. Some calves can be age- and source-verified, but others cannot. The industry deals with that. As a producer, eventually one force will outweigh the other and a new expectation is created.

One could say that vaccination programs are at that point today. Premium or no premium, calves are expected to be vaccinated.

Another example is dealing with a rose. Roses are considered to be very beautiful, and their trademark is the thorn. One can become so thick-skinned that one does not notice the thorns. On the other hand, one can be inexperienced and naive and give up picking roses because of the numerous injuries inflicted by the thorns.

Neither case is ever the answer. As one visits within the food industry today, numerous changes are occurring that require additional documentation as to the source of the many products needed. So, don't be so thick-skinned that one passes by the rose at the end of the stem because the thorns are no longer felt.

There is opportunity waiting for those in the beef industry who want it, but don't quit with the first prick of the thorn. Instead, refocus, realize there will be thorns and remember that there is a rose once one gets there.



**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 beef specialist. An archive of columns can be found at [www.BeefTalk.com](http://www.BeefTalk.com), and your comments are always welcome.*