



## Beef Talk

by **KRIS RINGWALL**, *Extension beef specialist, North Dakota State University*

### Get a calving book and use it.

Every so often, an industry actually faces the future. Often when that happens, not everything will be as it is today, so we talk about change with some authority. Talking with authority also means risk, since not all predicted change actually occurs.

This year, with some authority, I can say it would behoove producers to keep a calving book. Many already do, but the statement is not a simple statement.

During my many years of interacting with cow-calf producers, one very sore spot was discussing the importance of keeping individual calf records. If the expression “go fly a kite” meant anything, most kite stores would be out of kites, the better, so the industry can get down to the business of filling out a calving book.

#### Calving book contents

During the past years, most calving books have been an excellent vehicle for advertising, and often the date or calendar section was larger than the calf record section. It also is not hard to figure

out which calving books are designed by a committee, because they are too big to put in your shirt pocket or they don't have labels for data.

The reality of a calving book is simple: A calving book allows producers to write down the tag number they just put in the calf's ear and record the date of birth. For the skeptics — those who think calving books aren't accurate — one simply can assume they have never tagged a calf.

Most calves are easy to tag within 24 hours of birth. After that, you need to be extremely fast. After 48 hours, forget it — wait for your roundup. If the calves are walking around the calving pasture with a tag in their ear, believe me, the tags were placed at birth. Generally, after the birth date and individual tag number are recorded, depending on what the producer wants to remember about the calf but doesn't want to convert to memory, the rest of the calving book is filled out.

Typical data recorded is the mother's tag number; the sex of the calf; and perhaps a notation on birth weight, calving ease or miscellaneous

comments. The important items are the calf tag number and birth date. Obviously, without the mother's tag number, no performance data can be gathered, but each individual producer ultimately has to make those decisions.

#### Data and checklist

Don't let the extra data get in the way of writing down the basic data. The checklist for age and source verification is extremely short. First, individually identify each calf at birth with a visual tag and, if possible, apply the electronic identification (ID) tag at the same time.

Second, write the tag number and birth date in the calving book. That is it. That can be difficult, given the size of many cattle operations and shortage of labor. The next best alternative is to place the tag in the calves' ears when they are worked in the spring. If this alternative is used, the electronic ID tag also could be placed in the calf's ear at that time. These calves would then form the core group from which fall marketing groups could be selected and verified.

So, take the calving book, write down

individual calf tag numbers, and match the visual tag to the electronic tag. The North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association (NDBCIA) offers free calving books to those who request one. The book follows many of the common record practices and certainly assists a producer in preparing for age and source verification in the fall.

Your comments are always welcome at [www.Beeftalk.com](http://www.Beeftalk.com). For more information contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1133 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601. Or, go to [www.CHAPS2000.com](http://www.CHAPS2000.com). In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0286.



**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.