

Data That Delivers

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Imagine a business that didn't track its inputs or its outputs. Obviously, that would be a bad scenario. The demand for information is rapidly increasing when it comes to all sectors of the beef chain from commercial cow-calf to retail. The digital age we currently live in combined with genomic testing has streamlined selection and marketing to a speed that even now seems almost fictional. Inputs and outputs are the future of the industry and for all progressive cattle producers.

Retailers of all sizes are delving into marketing that connects consumers to the farm. As you may expect, large retailers can already scan a bag of lettuce and tell what farm it came from. If the thought of that makes you nervous, I don't blame you. However, the pros may outweigh the cons for most. Some leaders in the retail segment are looking ahead to a time when consumers can scan a QR code on a package of ribeye steaks to learn about the ranch or farm that it originated from. At least as of this writing, people will pay for that kind of story. Restaurants are increasingly promoting premium known-source menu items. You may also hear the term Blockchain which is a digital record of transactions from start to finish.

If scenarios like this seem too far-fetched, that is understandable, but regardless of how far we take our marketing, the information we provide to the next person in the beef chain can make a big difference. Producers that market feeders with EID traceability will be better prepared to hit the bigger premiums. Many programs are using RFID technology to track calf origin more efficiently. This transfer of data is now the standard for global beef trade.



Genetic testing and parentage information are standards in the purebred seedstock industry. Commercial operations are rapidly evolving in that direction as well. Retaining commercial replacements with genomic information will hopefully improve heifer retention and longevity by using heifer pregnancy and stayability markers, for example. Zoetis and Neogene both offer products that can provide genomic information on 18 or 16 traits, respectively. These tests rank groups of cattle for each trait as well as provide selection index options geared either toward maternal, production or carcass goals. There are many potential advantages for these tests as producers select heifer replacements. Traits that are lowly heritable such as fertility or hard to measure traits like tenderness can now be observed in the genomic scores of weaned calves. Another advantage of these selection tools is the opportunity to evaluate future cow cost on a group of potential replacements. Traits such as dry matter intake, residual feed intake and yearling performance are some of the traits used to predict differences in mature cow cost which will be met with higher scrutiny with increased feed prices. Genomic testing and RFID technology are examples of tools that can be used for improved herd management and marketing that help measure inputs and outputs on the farm.



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