

By Lorne McClinton



KNOWLEDGE TO MARKET

*The cattle industry hopes
Beef Information Exchange System
will open new markets*

Since 2006, Canadian cattle producers have been required to use the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency's (CCIA) radio-frequency identification (RFID) ear tags for age verification and to track cattle movement. This fall, producers can sign up for a new voluntary Web-based program, called the Beef Information Exchange System (BIXS), and link animal performance and production data to their RFID tags. Feedlot operators and packers will also be linking information, including carcass data, to the tags as they pass through the system. This shared data can be used to breed more productive animals, pry open restricted markets, and improve profitability.

Benchmark system. Most producers have little idea how their animals perform once they're sold. The BIXS program being developed by the Canadian Cattlemen's Association (CCA) will change this by allowing operators to see how their animals fare right through to slaughter. Larry Thomas, CCA program manager in Calgary, Alta., says that knowing how their animals stack up will allow producers

to accurately benchmark and improve their production management system.

There's nothing quite like it anywhere else in the world. Thomas says that the program will provide a unique way to help the Canadian industry position itself for the future.

The entire system is based on tying animal-specific information to its CCIA tag. Participating producers can quickly enter animals into the system by going online and recording their calves' birth date and tag number in their BIXS account. They can also enter a vast array of other production data as well, depending on how much information they wish to share.

Feedlots would submit their in and out dates as well as certain perfor-

mance and animal health records. Once the animal is slaughtered the packer uploads yield and grade information obtained from the carcass and, in time, detailed digital carcass data.

"You don't have to be enrolled in the Verified Beef Production (VBP) program, the on-farm food safety program, to be enrolled in BIXS," Thomas says. "We are highlighting the program in BIXS to help promote the Canadian Beef Advantage."

Easy to use. Neil Copithorne runs a 250 cow-calf pair operation with his father, David, west of Calgary. He was one of a handful of producers who tested the program for the CCA in the spring of 2010. He found it simple to go to the website and quickly load



►**Top left:** Canadian cattle producers have been required to use CCIA tags since 2006. ►**Above:** The CCA's Web-based BIXS program allows producers, feedlots and packers to share production and performance data by tying it to the CCIA tag.

►**Right:** Neil (left) and David Copithorne hope that the BIXS system will help open new niche markets and over time improve profitability.

hundreds of animals into the system.

"We added birthing dates, CCIA numbers, our vaccine records, and indicated we are VBP certified," Copithorne says. "Producers have the option of adding more detailed information if they desire. I don't see it generating a lot of extra money in the short term, but hopefully it will open up niche markets in the future." ■

