



## *A share of data*

*By Miranda Reiman*

Anyone with siblings can recall all the ways they were taught to share. With bunk beds and half the closet space, maybe you had double-occupancy bedrooms.

As children, you had to let cousins or friends play with your favorite truck, Barbie or basketball. Remember having to divvy up your Halloween candy so each family member got the same amount?

If you didn't learn it in your younger years, growing up and getting married certainly teaches some lessons in sharing. There are the joint bank accounts, household chores and personal memories.

Maturity helps you discover the many benefits that come from sharing, the good feeling, the chance for another to reciprocate the favor, and the list goes on and on. Yet when it comes to information, many farmers and ranches have a hard time with the concept.

You're naturally generous and willing to give of yourself, but many of you have drawn a line.

A university survey asks a few basic questions about financial records on your operation. "Whoa there, why do they need to know that?" You leave that slot blank. No need to dole out personal information, even if it does remain anonymous.

It's even worse when a government agency gets involved. Think about all the controversy surrounding the National Animal Identification System (NAIS) or Country of Origin Labeling (COOL). Much of that is a conflict over what data the government should or should not be able to access.

It seems all those benefits of sharing are forgotten.

There are times when letting your guard down could earn you more money though. Take source and age verification (SAV). Sure, at some point you'll probably be audited. Someone will need to "verify" your records with an on-site visit, but you do want to confirm that you're doing it correctly. Premiums can amount to more than \$20 per head for SAV calves.

Some programs let you give out more details, like breed, health programs and preconditioning strategies. That gives potential buyers even more reasons to show interest in your calves

Sharing might not always provide a direct payout, but its advantages can be seen further down the road. If a feedyard buys your calves, be sure to let them know what happened to them on the ranch. Be thorough. Tell them about the shots they've had and what plane of nutrition they've been on.

This will help the feeder mesh his management with yours. You might not see cash involved in this information exchange, but if the calves get a good start, they may finish well and that buyer will be back next year.

What about the survey that just showed up in your mailbox? There is often a good reason for wanting to pry into your business practices. Universities are trying to gather data to help understand the beef industry, how cattlemen run their farms and ranches, so they can innovate.

Ag media and companies are always trying to better understand the groups they serve. Taking a few minutes to fill out a questionnaire could lead to more on-target products and educational materials for your business.

So whether it's an increased premium or simply better information for all to use, sharing can prove it's value if you let it.

Next time in *Black Ink*, Steve Suther will look at the gift of quality. Questions? Call toll-free at 877-241-0717 or e-mail [mreiman@certifiedangusbeef.com](mailto:mreiman@certifiedangusbeef.com).

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