



By Mike McMorris, BIO General Manager
mmcmorris@biobeef.com • www.biobeef.com

VOLUME 2 • ISSUE 5



The Last Lemming

Leadership is a funny thing. You never want to be the lead lemming, at the front of the pack looking over a cliff with no chance to turn around and the momentum of the pack carrying you out into the air. But lemmings don't always head toward cliffs, they also make mass movements toward food, shelter and other things that they need. In that case, you don't want to be the last lemming or you may miss out.

Leadership in the human world is not that different. Sometimes we rush toward things that may appear good without understanding the consequences. At other times though, we hang back, play it safe, and ultimately, lose out. As producers and as an industry, the trick is to know when to get to the front of the pack and when to hang back a bit. When the pack moves, do you want to be at the front, middle or back? You need to know if you are headed toward food or a cliff! Below are three examples of current movements and my assessment of each as "food" or "cliff".

I was speaking with someone at an American breed association recently and he was sounding very frustrated with the US beef industry. They can't seem to move ahead with mandatory animal identification (ID). That's quite a contrast to the Canadian industry that instituted mandatory animal ID over a decade ago. Leaders at the time were heavily criticized and yet having each animal uniquely identified opens up a world of opportunities for beef producers. Managing foreign animal disease and increasing international market access are obvious examples. Connecting and using information on animals - pedigree to cooler - using national ID, will allow the beef industry to make significant changes. The Canadian Cattlemen's Association is showing good leadership with their current Beef Information Exchange System (BIXS) initiative. There is work yet to be done on tag retention and

information transfer. That said, I see a good ID system and development of information sharing systems as "food".

Traceability is all the rage today. The Federal, Provincial and Territorial Ministers recently made a commitment this summer to having a full traceability system in place for Canadian livestock. I know that traceability means different things to different people so let me put my own definition on it for now. Traceability is the ability to know where an animal was during its life. That may or may not include every movement. As with most things, more information is tempting but it also comes at a much higher cost! The key information is location and date, only updating it when an animal changes location. Industry leaders now have the task of developing a traceability system that is effective but maybe more importantly, efficient. I see traceability with some "potential to be food" but with a risk that if not managed properly, becoming a "cliff".

The whole field of genomics is both leading edge science and application happening at the same time. From a scientific point of view, the mind can wander - a recent *Maclean's* article spoke of the real possibility of bringing a dinosaur or woolly mammoth back to life by knowing their genetic makeup. Many people, me included, would love to see that, but really, to what practical end? A very practical example of using genomics is that beef producers can now use genomics to access genetic information on their animals at a reasonable cost, allowing better breeding decisions. The possibilities surrounding genomics will explode in the coming years. I call genomics "food" hands down.

There will be many other movements that you and industry leaders will need to assess.

Front, middle or back of the pack? Food or cliff? 