

Selling Calves Is More Than Hauling Them to Town

Today's calves have a reputation that is earned and recorded.

The producer may or may not be heavily involved, but the calf buyers are very involved. Buyers know most cattle and have kept track of previous years' performance. For the most part, the performance history of each load of calves is noted and calls go out to get more calves like those.

Are your calves on the call list and engaged in active participation in regard to buyers? If not, now is the time to get on the list. Here are six steps to raising calves that are in demand:

- Offer superior genetics
- Provide sound management
- Implement a preconditioning program
- Implement calf identification
- Certify production practices for the targeted market
- Engage in a good marketing strategy

The order of the steps is not as important as doing the steps.

Superior genetics are a product of good sire selection. Calves are a product of a producer's genetic program. Gone are the days when one eyeballs and guesses what the genetic package holds.

The appropriate mix of growth and carcass genes achieved through proven sires is critical, and the calves will reflect their genetic input. Fast-growing calves that have the genes to grade choice and offer the feedlot some flexibility in marketing a high-lean, heavy carcass are desirable.

Sound management is an assurance calves are adaptable and ready to be moved physically and mentally. Buyers will pay extra dollars to get the desired calves that have been under the care of a good manager who has adopted all the beef quality assurance principles.

Additionally, a good manager is someone who conducts business in a professional manner, pays attention to detail, has a broad grasp of the industry, has positive people skills, guides those who are supervised and pays attention to detail through documentation and the sale of a program.

A preconditioning program seems like a no-brainer, but many calves still show up at the markets with no acclimation to the world. Preconditioned calves are products of a complete health management program designed to minimize risk as calves leave the home ranch, travel through the marketing channels and arrive at a backgrounder or feedlot. These calves must be accustomed to water troughs and feed bunks, timely vaccinated with recommended vaccines, treated for

applicable parasites and fully processed regarding castration and horns.

Calf identification has been a bony point, but calves need a connection to their source and some form of identification that allows for proper acknowledgment of the individual calf. All calves are different, and some do not measure up. Those that measure up need to be identified, even in a pen of similar-colored average calves.

Certification of calves may be new to some but old hat to others. To obtain a premium, calves must be certified and acknowledged as to who they are as individuals.

As markets get more technical, this challenge becomes greater, but the difficulty does not remove the need to certify that the calf is what the producer claims. Call it the difference between generic and name-brand marketing; the difference is the name.

Finally, a good marketing strategy is paramount. Getting calves ready for market and capturing the available market dollars are the culmination of the total program. Perhaps the best advice still is to group a set of calves following proper preparation for the market and target the market with the appropriate set of calves.

Keep in touch with the local livestock market, and do not be a stranger. Do the sorting at home, and keep the market groups crisp

and sharp as they come closer to marketing day.

Granted, the thrill of seeing the whole calf crop loaded on the farm, unloaded at the sale barn and then acknowledged at sale time brings excitement to the day. But the more prudent approach of marketing selected groups of calves during a series of weeks or even months can complement specific markets and makes good sense.

The bottom line still remains: Calves will bring what the market needs, no more, no less. Remember, present well-prepared calves ready for the market, and don't forget to contact last year's buyers and to seek out a few extra buyers.

Marketing: It's how business survives. Do not give in to the mediocre. Progressive producers offer superior genetics, provide sound management, implement a preconditioning program, implement calf identification, certify production practices for a targeted market and engage in a good marketing strategy.

Aggressively market these calves. Others don't know what you do unless you tell them. Tell the buyers, provide the facts and note the potential performance expectations of the calves you are about to sell. Brag a little and be proud. You can do it. **HW**

Dreams, Opportunity Make the Future

Dreams are part of the human psyche, framed by thoughts, ambitions and hopes of our current and past situations.

But at day's end, one needs to ask, "What happened to my morning dream? Did I make progress? Did I lose it? Did I sell it?" After all, others need what we have; therefore, if we are not careful, at day's end, we find out we sold our dream.

By selling, we return to what we had. I always can remember each fall as a child when the calves and lambs were sold off, wishing we could keep more, do more and grow. Perhaps wishes and dreams are a bit of the same: a desire to do.

Beef production is a buy-sell business in which people produce beef and, we hope, sell to the high bidder. The beeves conceived on a cattle unit may be sold many times because when the price goes up, the tendency is to sell.

Sale time often is directly related to the price. And there go dreams. Those childhood memories repeat: How often do we watch the calves go down the road to market and mutter, "There is always next year"?

All right, I can feel the reality checkers. Buy low, sell high, but you missed and bought high, sold low. In more current times, after a public

presentation is made, the fact checkers remind us quickly of our mistakes or what may be termed a "misguided" dream. And so, do we sell our dreams for fear that the reality checkers will arrive before our next night's sleep?

The world of beef has so much room for more dreams. Price seems to be a driving factor in selling or buying, and we understand that. Opportunities in the beef business abound, and the development of future operations that are products of what we dream can help us reach our desire to do, to achieve.

Perhaps, for some, the dream is to achieve the maximum dollar value to generate maximum return on the dollars invested. But what we dream should mean more than only dollars. Those shipped calves, once sold, are now someone else's opportunity.

What about dreams that integrate beef production in a sensible and sustainable system while practicing good stewardship of all the resources? What about dreams of producing a solution that enables more people to consume beef? What about the goals to improve soil health (the source of cattle production), to offer more living diversity per acre of land utilized by cattle, to generate more pounds of forage per acre that results in more

pounds of beef per acre and to put more family spendable dollars into the operation and community?

Dreams are what will drive the beef industry, changing, molding and fitting it into the rest of the world in due time. Dreams are what improve and sustain the very world in which we live. We need to stay on track and remain focused on our desired outcomes.

The other night, I enjoyed a good meal of grilled barbequed chicken. The uniqueness was the source of the chicken: two distinct genetic types. One type represented the typical chicken available today to the average consumer. The chicken was excellent, with a large proportion of white meat from a heavily breasted broiler.

This chicken represented the fine-tuned genetics produced within a modern poultry operation. The poultry used would have had the genes that resulted from extensive selection models based on rapid growth and specific production-line objectives.

Production of the chicken could have been in someone's backyard or a small, medium or large poultry facility because poultry production breeds have been selected for extensive hatchery production to assure availability and survivability in all management scenarios around the

world. Those same birds are available at local grocery stores across the world, so regardless of the management system, the opportunity for tasty, locally flavored barbequed chicken is readily available, with little difference in the poultry used.

I said I had two types of chicken that evening. The other chicken was a product of breed-specific production with no modern selection models applied. The chicken lacked the large proportion of white meat with thinner, longer muscles throughout the chicken's frame. Some would say the second chicken was bony when compared with the more commercially available chicken.

Both birds were served as grilled barbequed chicken. They differed in taste, texture and all other attributes of satisfying the human palate. Both were good but uniquely different. As people, when we mention that something is different, we may be quick to be defensive, to put off or even make sure a negative note is added to the conversation.

The variation that exists in the beef industry, just like in the chicken industry, is an opportunity waiting to happen. Do not sell a dream, but persevere to bring the dream to life. Opportunity makes the future. **HW**