

The Missing Sock

Successful beef operations are based on an attitude of "how can I help?"

Good cowhands check to make sure gates are shut, take a second glance as the cows and calves run back to the pasture, make sure all the lights are shut off, ask if the pail calf got fed, and clean up litter. Simply put, they're always looking, always thinking, always doing.

This upfront, positive attitude gets things done, keeping a smile on the flagship.

The other morning, as I was getting ready to start the day, I found only one sock from a pair. Where was the other one? I searched briefly because wearing unpaired socks really never has been well accepted. In the end, a substitute pair was grabbed and pressed into duty for the day.

Like many hectic mornings, we get up and get going, executing our plan. Some days, the plan works. On other days, we head off into an unplanned direction. Either way, we generally get to the end of the day.

Unfortunately, sometimes the flagship takes a tip, and someone does not get to the end of the day. The news is sad and disheartening, and we gather to comfort and share assurances that we can go on.

The trials and tribulations of the world, however, can fog us in. Those without an anchor wander off searching for a better place, which generally is closer than we think. It is easy to feel like that missing sock and digress to remembering socks are constantly being walked on with little relief.

Speaking of socks, besides the missing one, if one looks at the pile

of socks needed to keep a family on the go, the numbers get large. When our family was growing, one day the sock pile had 345 socks waiting patiently for sorting and pairing: big, little, old, new, worn-out and misplaced socks. Even with the most diligent effort, at the end, some lay waiting with no match. How can that be? The lost sock never seems to be found.

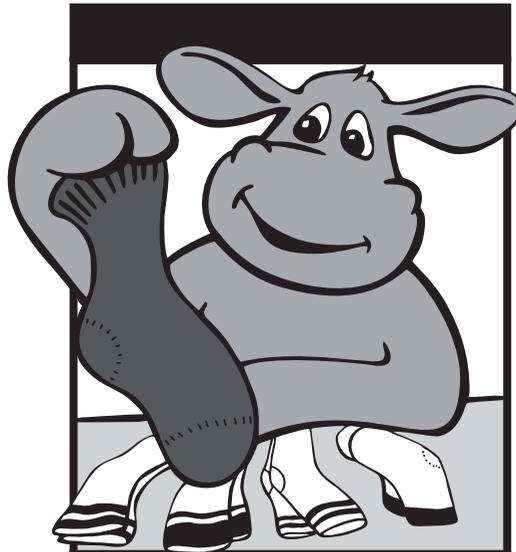
Patience and understanding

Families, and life, have a lot in common with socks. Families are a mix of young and old: some new faces, some big, some small, a few fairly well-worn faces and those still in the package. Even the misplaced belong.

As the socks fall from the dryer, there is no rhyme or reason to the mix. And families are truly a mix of many, many people, no rhyme or reason needed, glued together by a single bond called family.

As we travel, expand our endeavors and choose our path in life, this bond grows and reaches well beyond the nucleus of family, crossing paths with others, like the socks in the dryer, in random and chaotic ways. But at day's end, those who work together with patience and understanding will grow together.

As beef producers, when new cows or calves are brought into the herd, a watchful eye will note a herd does not form overnight. But with time, the outcasts slowly mingle and, by season's end, a herd is formed. The cows in the



Families and cow herds have a lot in common with socks. Even the misplaced belong.

herd will defend each other, braving each new sunrise together.

Perhaps cows and socks, families and socks, life and socks can help in a foggy world with foggy thoughts. Feet are rather chilly without socks. Compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience all come to be engrained in the essence of human relationships so that, ultimately, we must accept each other for who we are, forgiving our weaknesses and strengthening our bonds of the herd or, should I say, life.

Unfortunately, today's environment is often hectic and very fast-paced, with little time to appreciate the wisdom of old socks and old cows. It is easy to throw water on a fire without a change of heart. It is easy to blame, to read a long list of excuses hidden in the busy pace we keep. Socks don't complain,

cows grow into herds and we need a good attitude.

Adapting to change

The beef business is a business of herding, caring and providing for those that cannot provide for themselves. Focusing on the beef business, the business, too, must adapt to a changing world.

But rushing to serve a world without balance ultimately gets us nowhere. Beef programs need to entwine with a world that is full of people, and support for both needs to exist simultaneously. So we end where we started: Successful beef operations are based on an attitude of "how can I help?"

That help is not a product of "my way" or "your way" but "our way." Joining forces, exploring new ideas and implementing beef production systems of the future will integrate culture, production and business.

What meets one's need may not meet someone else's need, but giving a little, taking a little ultimately will mold a model that will work. Open minds, along with desire and good data, will fix the cracks, and the flagship sails.

A misplaced sock is little reason to tip the flagship. Attitude, a good attitude, is a must to see through the fog as we roll with every day. Well, one sock is missing, but the world continues to move. And for the cows, fog means nothing; the herd grazes and keeps on going. **HW**

