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NDSU Extension Service

BeefTalk: Cow contentment is evident when calls are only to the next pen

By Kris Ringwall, Extension Beef Specialist,

How great it is not to be a cow. Well, at least it appears that way. But I wonder if their stress level is lower than that of humans. Recently, I traveled to several cattle producer gatherings and couldn't help but ponder the pluses and minuses of this human interaction, which brought me to the rhetorical question: who really has the upper hand--cattle producers or the cows?

A cow's life is almost stress free. Producers take care of everything: food, shelter, care, education, etc. We probably could learn a little from the cows.

Whatever happened to gently walking the cows to pasture through green valleys and rolling hills? One could explore various biological relationships

along the way while mapping out a lengthy production plan (without a cell phone) and still have time left at the end of the day.

But, back to real life and the human interaction (or lack of it) in the hallways of the convention. Stop lights at intersections and directional arrows were needed to accommodate the studious producers (with cell phones on their ears) working their way through the maze. Everyone needed to get somewhere and get details along the way. (One enterprising lad could actually navigate the aisles and type on his portable computer while moving from meeting to meeting.)

Imagine cows with cell phones, wandering aimlessly with no apparent sense of direction, speaking to someone that isn't there. Imagine collisions because a cow is not paying attention to calves bucking around in the pasture. This kind of behavior seems to be quite contagious among humans, and the incidence is increasing at an alarming rate.

If a cow enters a pen and nobody is there, she doesn't call. She waits. If she eventually decides to call, it is only a local call to the next pen. Producers seem to have a calling urge, almost immediately upon arriving anywhere. The world seldom changes, but there is an overwhelming urge to check.

Likewise, I have never seen a cow concerned about the markets or even tomorrow's weather. Cows seldom travel, and when they do, it's short distances at the most. If they plan extended travel, they just board and get off when the gate agent says. They don't ask any questions, because they really don't need to. Return connections are never a problem. They are content when fed and expect lodging with no perks. They have no luggage, and no matter where they go, someone always cleans up after them. And

no tip is expected.

For us, it's not so simple. We worry from the start if everything is right with us, the shampoo, the comb, extra attire, etc. Not a cow. Rain or shine, she's content. Oh, don't forget our vitamins, minerals and other daily potions. Not the cow. We load, unload, load and unload and eventually get on the road. The cow loads and goes.

And then there is the destination. Cows talk to each other. All the new arrivals gather in the same pasture and compare notes. Cows don't walk around with gadgets strapped to their heads as if talking to nobody. Cows greet new cows with open excitement, often vocalizing that excitement and even extending an over-personalized sniff.

We, on the other hand, get right down to business, cell phone here, cell phone there. If you ask the cow, the world moves at the same time today as it will tomorrow. So what is the rush? Do a little cud chewing and today's concerns--well, there are none.

Have you ever asked a cow what she thinks of your new micro-sized, hand-held digitized notebook, that you need a new set of digits (formally called fingers) to operate? I bet you won't get a response. I sometimes wonder if cows know something I don't.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at www.BeefTalk.com For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to www.CHAPS2000.COM on the Internet. In correspondence about this

column, refer to BT0026.

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