

NEWS

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BeefTalk: The Horse Did Not Get Saddled Today

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There are times in this world when we all need to stop, take a deep breath and reflect. Sept. 11, 2001, was one of those days. The horse wasn't saddled. The sun came up. And the sun set. The cows were content having had a new pasture to browse. The bulls were back in their club and the countryside was settling in for the fall look.

But things were different. The prairies have always been tough. Not only for the vastness of life, but for the care givers too. I always like to look at the hands--not the soft hands that punch key boards like I do, but the rough hands that have pulled calves, thrown hay bales, changed the sickle bar, replaced the tire or carried many a bucket of grain. At the North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension Center, like most every agricultural operation, we have had some bumps and bruises. But it was

nothing like the news on Sept. 11.

Beef cattle professionals know all too well the fragileness of life. For us in the livestock industry, Sept. 11 was a reality check. All our hearts went out to our neighbors to the east as we individually and collectively huddled to hear the latest news about the events at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

Our priorities for the day (and I suspect weeks ahead) changed. Perhaps all the cows were not checked or the work was slower. The pace was a half step off, and the conversations a word or two short. Perhaps a look was all that was needed. The children sat closer, and their eyes were empty, almost afraid.

My memory switched to a young, tragic death. I remember returning from the funeral and picking up an egg that was about to hatch. Emerging from that egg, was a new life, totally unknowing of the day's events. Earlier in the day, the youngster, with all its might, started breaking through from the only life it had ever known.

There was no reason. The youngster had been well cared for, and all its needs met. But, the youngster kept on pecking. First a crack, then a second crack, a split and finally a hole. Through that hole came the most beautiful light the youngster had ever seen. So the pecking pursued. With unending persistence, the youngster encircled the egg, with only faith that a better life existed on the other side.

As the outer shell began to give, the youngster stretched with the power of Samson. Gradually, the egg gave way in my hand and with toes clenching the large half of the egg, the youngster gave a final thrust and was free.

Blind, unending faith brought the youngster from the security of the egg to the vastness of a new world. In my hand was no knowledge of how tough this life can be, but only a brightness of new life, ready, willing and able to secure tomorrow's future. For what were tears for me, were morning dew to a youngster with no where to go but up.

Still, for those of us here today there is a void. The future will be secure, fall roundups will continue and next spring's calving will bring smiles to our faces, but sadness will be present for some time. I often look up into the crystal clear North Dakota skies and watch those majestic planes leaving their powdery white trails across the blue sky, and disappear over the horizon, wondering where they are coming from and going to.

Today, our children are sitting closer and people are making calls, seeking reassurance that their loved ones are okay. As we sift through the physical, spiritual and emotional rubble of the events of Sept. 11, 2001, the resolve to realign priorities and become care givers is even stronger.

The beef business can be tough, but on Sept. 11 hearts moved east--and the horse wasn't saddled.

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 BT0056.

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