

Beef Industry Needs Cooperation

By Kris Ringwall
Extension Beef Specialist
NDSU Extension Service



The freshness of spring is present in the countryside. The excitement of spring turnout, the new shine to the hair, the bulls frisking in the dirt, the cows spread out across the green carpet and the calves grouped safely in the pasture cove bring to mind the wonders of being in the beef industry.

I wish I could say the same for beef producers. A picture of locked horns, flared nostrils and broken limbs would seem more realistic. The “I” mentality seems to be running strong these days, such as “I can do it, regardless of the consequences to the whole.”

The industry seems to be lining up, I versus you, a division set hard. “I am right, you are wrong.” I wish I had the answer, but I don’t.

Does life start at a point and then expand as life progresses, or does life simply start in an expanded mode and end at a point? Perhaps life starts at a point, expands and then returns to a point. Seems frivolous, but I wonder, given the current state of affairs, if some people have pondered the big picture or simply are reacting to the present.

What is the impact, and ultimately, who is my neighbor? Life starts with youth. When working with young people, the comment is made that “you have your whole life ahead of you.” This saying is intended to be one of encouragement, an acknowledgment of hope.

Whatever the current concern is, it certainly cannot be greater than the total opportunistic expansiveness of the future. Choices always are present and although the correct response is somewhat elusive at times, choices exist.

As one matures, a similar phrase of hope is not so readily available. “You don’t have much time left, so you better make the best of it!” “Well, you’ve certainly used a good portion, but the rest is ready and waiting.” “I am sure things will get better, there is still time on the clock.”

These attempts at hope really don’t seem to instill the same level of opportunity. With maturity comes many known, but generally unwanted insecurities.

The retirement projections just don’t seem as big, the aching elbow is connected to the sore shoulder, the children are no longer on their prescribed paths, current income just doesn’t meet outgo or the latest financial endeavor is failing.

Pressure builds from dependents. In the end, those around us may suffer indirect ramifications of our own failure or may be impacted directly by the loss of financial, physical or emotional support. As the clock goes “cuckoo,” there is a distinct wish for overtime.

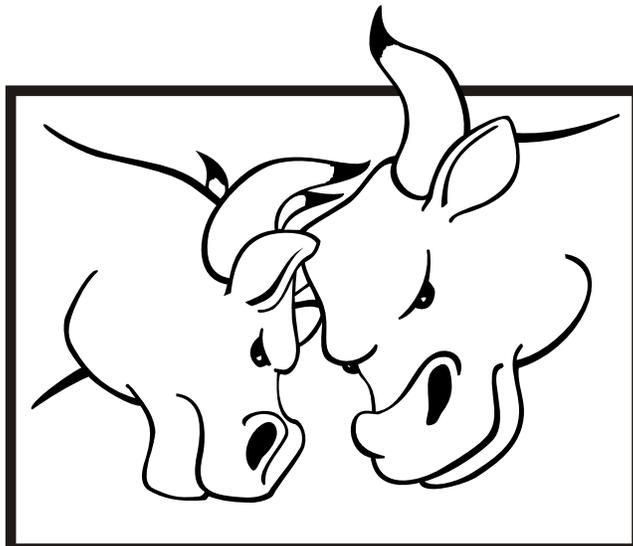
These same struggles exist in the beef business and have similar consequences. The struggles of youth become the struggles of age. The innocence of youth is gone and the baggage of life piles on. The “I can do it alone” mentality sets in and the “by gosh, I will do it” trap is set, leading to the line in the sand.

There are limits to how much we can carry. With maturity comes independence, but does the industry really need that much independence or is some level of dependence also an ingredient for teamwork? Right now, I know the beef cows are doing well, but the industry is a mess.

It’s a sad day when the morning greeting rings out “I will see you in court.” Perhaps we need to sit down, ponder a bit and contemplate our need for dependency as well as independence. In time, hopefully not too long, we all need to grow and slowly replace “I can do it alone” with a little teamwork. A team of neighbors and young people thinking this cow business is a great life.

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 BT0246.



**Is it me, is it you,
is it them or is it us?**