

## Pick the High Spot, Provide Some Protection and Bedding

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Returning from a loop around the Midwest reminds me of the vastness of the cattle industry and the residual nature of the business. Many livestock operations have production of livestock as a primary focus but many, if not most, of the livestock operations are residual in nature.

Many times the operation is utilizing the livestock, generally beef, to provide increased market value to a product that is not very digestible by humans (grass). Other times, a large quantity of forage (feedstuff) is available in a local area which drives the price downward and makes the feeding of livestock profitable. Each local area has its challenges.

I was reminded of mud as I drove east and south. I saw cattle managing the spring thaw with patience, even though knee deep in mud. Mud is generally not a problem at the Dickinson Research Extension Center and southwest North Dakota. Yet the contrast brought to mind the many factors that enter into the equation of how to raise cattle, and the even more difficult problem of assigning a value to cattle.

How cattle are managed, handled and fed has a huge impact on the ability to obtain a value on calves or fed cattle when selling by the pound. No one wants to bid on cattle that are caked with mud from tail to brisket. I observed one lot of cattle standing close to the road. Rain exceeding an inch created muddy conditions and I really had to ponder the rationale of feeding cattle in a poor drainage area.

Not far down the road was a better designed feeding operation. Recent engineering efforts created a good waste flow. The cattle were not knee deep in mud. The facility costs had to be greater for the latter operation. Anyone involved in livestock realizes some days are good for guests and others are not.

On wet, cold and windy days, no matter what approach is utilized, the livestock business can be challenging. Cattle standing knee deep in mud by the bunk need to reach high ground where dry bedding is available. Generally called mounds, the development of dry and bedded

rest areas for cattle is certainly needed.

Vern Anderson, animal scientist at the Carrington Research Extension Center, evaluated the financial impact of bedding. Anderson noted the costs of bedding steers were obviously zero for no bedding, \$5.77 per head for modestly bedded steers and \$10.15 for generously bedded steers. Modestly bedded cattle always had access to dry bedded mounds and generously bedded cattle simply had twice the bedding.

Anderson noted that providing no bedding is simply not possible in northern environments. Even the no bed steers received some bedding to alleviate stress at the very end of the feeding period in the second year.

The bottom line revealed very interesting statistics. When Anderson valued the steers on the rail, the no bedded steers averaged \$773, the modestly bedded averaged \$816 and the generously bedded averaged \$819. The added value was due to more desirable carcasses and better growth rates, and feed per pound of gain.

Cattle perform in good environments, and at least in this country, those environments need to be designed. Even in the not so well designed lot, now is a good time to scan the horizon, locate or mark the high spot and provide some protection and bedding.

Good animal husbandry, good animal welfare, profitability and a wholesome product are signs of astute cattle producers. Whether calving cows or feeding calves, spring brings moisture and moisture brings mud, all priming us for what is ahead. But for now, bedding pays and makes for happy cows and calves and better steaks in the end.

May you find all your USAIP ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at [www.BeefTalk.com](http://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](http://www.CHAPS2000.com) on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0189.

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## The Value of Bedding Steers

|                  | <b>Cost of Bedding</b> | <b>Carcass Value</b> |
|------------------|------------------------|----------------------|
| No bedding       | \$0                    | \$773                |
| Modest bedding   | \$5.77                 | \$816                |
| Generous bedding | \$10.15                | \$819                |

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