

BeefTalk: Husbandry and Science Overlap, But Not Completely

When the end of the day arrives, the facts and figures that sounded good in the morning may not have held, but a good crew is what will bring the day to a close.

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The report from the human side of the chute was not very good. We had 32 open heifers that were pastured together and exposed to one bull.

The bull had passed the breeding soundness exam. He was at least interested in the heifers at the time of turnout.

Once we had the news, the bull was brought in for a recheck. After an examination, it was obvious that the bull had damaged his penis. Given the timing and zero pregnancy rate, the damage would have been done between the time of the breeding soundness exam and bull turnout.

If there is a conclusion to this story, it is that even with reasonable data and appropriate management actions, plans do not always go as expected. The open heifers left for town and so did the bull.

The focus has changed. Instead of pondering what to do with next year's calves from these heifers, the pondering is on what to do with the money.

Given the year, the money will be converted quickly to hay because the rest of the herd still needs to be fed. In general, producers always need to have their radar up and working.

As the heifers left the ranch, I reflected on the fact that the ranching business is not all data. All the reports and numbers serve as inputs, but are not the actual decisions.

Producers make the actual decisions by integrating all that they know with all the experience that they have gained. The data supplements and helps the memory, but great breeding soundness scores mean nothing once a bull breaks his penis.

I recall another story offered by Greg Mantz with the Central Grassland Research Extension Center in Streeter that was published in the center's annual report.

"When bulls were sent to the pastures in July 2007, an Angus bull intended to be placed in a pasture with mature cows was mistakenly put in the pasture with the smaller-framed virgin heifers," Greg noted in the report. "As a result, the 2008 calving season was one in which our calf puller never got rusty."

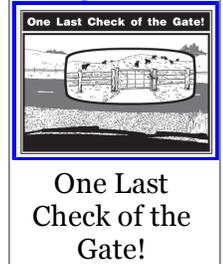
Greg went on to summarize, "Not counting two sets of twins, which resulted in three live calves, the 45 Angus-bred heifers we calved resulted in 16 jack pulls and five cesarean sections for a total assist rate of 47 percent."

Greg also said no heifers were lost and only two calves were born dead, but it required hard work from the livestock crew and the services of a skilled veterinarian.

Any of us who have been around at calving would not want to relive that calving season.

<http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/news/columns/beef-talk/beef-talk-husbandry-and-science-overlap-but-not-comple...> 10/17/2008

Images



We are fairly good at rolling with the punches when mistakes happen. When the end of the day arrives, the facts and figures that sounded good in the morning may not have held, but a good crew is what will bring the day to a close.

If a plan does not work out on paper, the probability of the plan working in the real world is zero. However, just because something works on paper still does not mean the plan will work if the appropriate people and resources are not in place.

In the end, it takes a science-based team blended with a husbandry-based team to make the beef business work. Never assume something was done and proceed without checking and then rechecking.

Likewise, maybe the data had a flaw in the morning, but the data collected later on in the day helped revive the plan, refocus some efforts and allowed for a new plan the next day.

Business is a constantly changing atmosphere. The beef business must interact with the biology and that interaction is people.

Perhaps a couple of mistakes are not so bad. The mistakes are reality and serve as a constant reminder to make sure you shut the gate and be on the safe side. Look in the rear view mirror and double check.

Some people are good with numbers and some are good with chores, but it takes both to bring the day to a close.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at <http://www.BeefTalk.com>.

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