

BeefTalk: No Least Cost Here

More cold days will test the skills of hardy beef producers.

By Kris Ringwall, Beef Specialist

NDSU Extension Service

Beef production is not for the faint of heart, especially when the temperatures dip to minus 25 to minus 30 degrees. The temperatures (and the wind chill) are the reality check that flesh can get cold very fast and then crack just like glass.

Cracks in a windshield can spread many ways to create a maze of total, random interaction that gives birth to new cracks. Feeling the event, however, is much different.

Bare fingers on a cold, metal gate can create sensations that rival cracking glass. The sensation of the gradual, deliberate, unstoppable cracking of human flesh likely will be remembered and could leave a mark.

The iciclelike sensations spread in slow motion. The ultimate outcome is replacing the much needed glove and doing a quick review if the mission to close (or open) the gate was accomplished.

Those not in the beef business recoiled at the hardships brought on by the current cold snap. For those hardy souls feeding and caring for livestock, this is everyday life.

Survival outside requires additional energy (feed) for the cows to survive. For beef producers, the needs are real and not just fireside stories.

Shortcuts and cheap solutions are not the answer to raising beef cattle. The current cold wave emphasizes the need to be prepared and that industry solutions are not always best proposed by nonindustry players.

The monster could be the gate that is now frozen shut after being secured last summer. The pliers slip out of the grasp of the cumbersome gloves, which prevent a good hold.

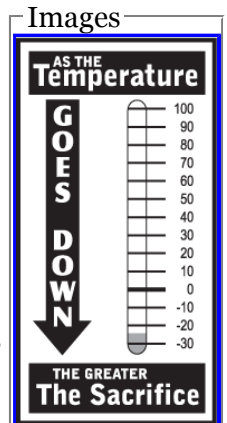
Bare hands feel the pangs of broken glass as the pliers clip the wire and free the gate. The worst is yet to come.

Cattle are pushing and shoving as they await their daily drink. A quick look reveals the valve is stuck. A quick shake with the gloved hand and the sound of flowing water is perceived. The cattle are happy, but much to my chagrin, I stand holding the float that for some reason decided today was the day to disconnect from the old water fountain.

The shutoff valve is tucked away below the frost line. It is accessible, but without gloves because it is under 2 feet of 40-degree water. However, the water is warmer than the minus 25-degree air temperature.

As I reconnect the float, I gain a new appreciation for the size of those dainty screws and nuts needed to secure the float to the valve. My fingers are past numb and a quick reheat is in order, but I am confident the nut will remain and the water trough is secured.

More cold days will test the skills of hardy beef producers. The reality is that raising cattle during the winter is not a simple task.



As the
Temperature
Goes Down -
The Greater
the Sacrifice

The least-cost approach may be a good summer special, but come winter, there is nothing cheap about getting a day's chores done. The challenges are many, such as trying to stretch out an extension cord (a frozen, tangled and unforgiving mess), fixing the broken feed wagon, starting vehicles or waiting for help that cannot arrive until the roads are open.

Providing for cattle is not easy. The solutions to problems are generally self-found and with the arrival of a particularly harsh cold front, we are reminded that there are no specials when it comes to running a cattle operation.

Tools need to fit, equipment needs to work and tractors need to be plugged in. There are no options.

Cattle depend on the producer. Whether it is cold or not, the cows need to be fed.

If nothing else, as one enjoys a great beef meal, words of thanks should go to all those who literally, from the tips of their fingers, sacrifice for the food we all eat.

Here's hoping the tractor starts so the feed can be delivered!

May you find all your ear tags.

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

For more information, contact the NDBCIA Office, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to <http://www.CHAPS2000.com> on the Internet.

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Source: Kris Ringwall, (701) 483-2348, ext. 103, kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu

Editor: Rich Mattern, (701) 231-6136, richard.mattern@ndsu.edu

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