

BeefTalk 482: Young Minds, More Questions

Virtually every segment of the industry lives on limited, small margins.

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How does someone reach out and make a living in the beef business?

There are many paths. Knowing which path will be the most profitable and fulfill one's dreams is difficult to predict.

Finding the value in beef production is difficult. Blaming or pointing fingers at segments in the industry is counterproductive. Virtually every segment of the industry lives on limited, small margins.

The difference between money going out and money coming in is small. As a result, efficiency and size are major components of many beef operations.

Dickinson State University offers a course in solving cow-calf management problems. Students are challenged to review their own and cooperating North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association producer herds and develop improvement plans in each herd.

The process involves reviewing various management and operational activities in each ranch and then finding opportunities for improvement. These opportunities are defined as best management practices.

This is a great exercise for the student and producer, especially as one sits back and looks at the concerns of younger minds. As a start, students are challenged to identify potential issues and expand on thoughts behind these issues as they prepare to meet their mentor herds.

Students presented several questions, which is an indication of the diversity of managerial questions and potential answers that are posed to beef producers throughout the production cycle. What follows are the questions and a broad generic answer from the student who asked the question.

Why should one ear tag a calf? It is the bottom line that counts. If more money is not returned, then why ear tag or participate in the age and source verification of calves?

Why should a producer utilize more than one breed of cattle? Uniformity sells cattle and a uniform set of cattle is more easily obtained within a single breed.

Are your facilities ready for the upcoming winter? Herd facilities need to be weather- proofed, accessible and workable to ensure survival, regardless of the weather.

Why not eat locally grown beef? Local producers would benefit and it would be for the greater good of the community as well.

Are expected progeny differences (EPDs) the best way to select a bull? EPDs are an effective and accurate method to predict future offspring performance.

What is the future of the farm and ranch work force? Local community-based labor encourages a sense of community and strengthens the local economy.

What is the future of beef operations? The current trend is one of fewer, but larger, beef operations.

Should bulls have a breeding soundness exam? A preventative reproductive evaluation of bulls saves money in the future.

Should cattle be grass- or grain-fed? The answer is traditional; people like grain-fed beef, but grass-fed still remains a niche market.

Why perform a pregnancy evaluation on cows? Feeding open cows costs money with no return.

How is the best way to handle cattle? Cattle are not people, so producers need to learn and understand how cattle see and hear the world around them to be better cattle handlers.

Is there an advantage in raising natural beef versus traditional beef production? Although there is a niche market for natural beef, a substantial premium is needed to justify natural beef production.

How do I get more involved in a family operation? Generational changeover in any farm or ranch is difficult, but it starts with open, honest communication surrounded by realistic fiscal projections.

There is no shortage of questions. The students explored and probed best management practices. In the end, the students slowly were absorbed into the reality of the beef business.

The answers to the questions were hidden in the scattered data that is seldom fully analyzed. The young minds were able to review old problems. New solutions to the old problems are always somewhere and need to be found.

Once found, old minds need to ponder and deal with an inescapable question. How does one implement young thoughts within old thinking?

Not easy, plus the new thoughts always must be seasoned with wisdom.

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.

When Asked, What Do Young People Ask Within the Beef Business?

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What is the future of beef operations?

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How do I get more involved in a family operation?