

## BeefTalk: School Bells Are Ringing

### What a Way to Start the School Year

I pledge  
My Head to clearer thinking,  
My Heart to greater loyalty,  
My Hands to larger service, and  
My Health to better living,  
For my club, my community,  
my country, and my world.

What a Way to Start the School Year

Young people are once again asking to have the opportunity to take over the reins someday and be part of the cattle industry.

Fall, despite the ups and downs of weather and other difficult issues, always means a new school year. Summer vacation is over and life starts to migrate toward thoughts of learning and advancing in life.

Vacation is good, but the real essence of success means gaining knowledge on what one wants to do in life. To do better, much like the 4-H creed, I pledge my head to clearer thinking, my heart to greater loyalty, my hands to larger service and my health to better living, for my club, my community, my country and my world. That creed has been recited millions of times and has led young people to make commitments that affect their lives and those around them.

In particular, I teach a class in the fall called Problems in Livestock Management. The principal objective of the class involves the management and evaluation of a system within the cow-calf enterprise.

As we concluded the first lecture, I asked the class to write what they thought of the beef business. There was no direction given, only that they give an honest expression of what they thought was relevant.

All the students come from active cow-calf enterprises. To paraphrase their thoughts: The beef industry is profitable. Even for the students who have not lived through previous cycles of the cattle business, the feeling that current price levels were at all-time highs was evident.

The environment that these students are exposed to is different than previous classes. While extremely excited to capitalize on the ability and opportunity to bring home some real dollars, the need to meet the many challenges within the cattle business also is very real. All the students inferred that the current cattle price levels are significant.

The downside is obvious, at least for those looking to get started in the beef business. The cost of getting into the business is significant and, in some cases, prohibitive. The reality is that, in some parts of the country, producers are exiting the business due to environmental extremes, while producers in other parts of the country cannot expand fast enough to accommodate forage production or other feed reserves. This provides one with a real reminder that the cattle business still is a roll of the dice. A bad roll may mean a quick exit.

For the savvy young minds, the question quickly becomes one of beating the odds. The increasing access to foreign markets was noted but expressed with caution because the ups and downs of foreign markets can bring significant uncertainty.

The concept of involving new technology was exciting and expressed by the students. The ability to select cattle through appropriate genetic technology to build a herd that will meet very specific objectives was real to them. New tools, such as the selection for feed efficiency that would lower cow-calf production costs, will be implemented. A strong desire to keep up with changes in technology also was noted, with the idea that the failure to incorporate solid information within the enterprise will result in negative impacts in the future.

As a young person, how do I get into the family beef operation? That question is always there no matter what the current conditions are in the beef industry. How does the constant give and take between current and future management integrate from one generation to the next? This question is much more pronounced today than in previous years because it is driven by the sheer momentum of dollars and value within the beef industry.

Young people are once again asking to have the opportunity to take over the reins someday and be part of the cattle industry. That is what is exciting as the school bells ring once again. There are the slow, trudging lines of students filling the desks, but they are excited about having their chance at doing what we have so often done, which is to pledge our heads to clearer thinking, our hearts to greater loyalty, our hands to larger service and our health to better living, for our clubs, our communities, our country and our world.

Let's hope that, as the gates are opened in the spring and another class graduates, the world is ready.

As for the beef industry, get ready for change because of new ideas. Coming up is a smart young class that is technology savvy, yet beef cow smart. Most students said they hope their parents are open to some new ideas.

Yes, I think new ideas are great, but a little seasoned advice is always worth listening to.

Let the year began.

May you find all your ear tags.