

BeefTalk 781: Another Great School Year Begins

The integration of knowledge from one generation to the next can be difficult in the beef industry.

Every fall means the start of the school year, and although continued education throughout life is important, there is always something significant about the primary, secondary and post-secondary education start up times.

Most noticeable is the change in the agricultural labor force. At the Dickinson Research Extension Center, the summer interns return to college. Usually after a short break at home, they head off to school. The workforce notices the difference. The movement of cattle, fence repair, even opening a gate, now requires a few more steps for the same pair of hands instead of an extra pair of hands.

In some respects, the quiet is nice as well. Less need to keep everyone moving and only the need to get oneself moving is not a bad thing.

In regard to summer interns and youth helping out on the farm or ranch, the hope is that the real essence of summer was having a successful opportunity to learn. Improving one's knowledge is the key to success and reminds us that we all should strive to improve.

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. The 4-H Creed has been recited millions of times and truly has led young lives to make commitments that not only impact their own lives, but also those around them.

In particular, I teach a class in the fall entitled "Problems in Livestock Management." The objective of the class involves management and evaluation of management within a cow-calf enterprise. As we conclude the first lecture, I ask the class to write what they think of the beef business.

I do not give advice, but only ask for an honest expression of what they thought was relevant as young people involved or desiring to be involved in an active cow-calf enterprise. The new class starts next week, but through time, the thoughts have been similar.

Young people are always positive and quick to make the assumption that the beef industry is profitable. They assume that entry into the business will mean that the profit presumed to be in the industry will provide them with a means to a good life. Costs are seldom, if ever, mentioned.

Although the rate of increase in the price of cattle has slowed, seldom do the students reflect any thoughts related to previous years of cattle prices. Students tend to be in the here and now, not the past. In fact, even a question about events within the cattle industry from months past will bring puzzled looks.

Most students can tell you, in great detail, about the social events of those they know, but they have little, if any, knowledge of the broader news events of the day. In fact, what may have been a large headline in a crop or beef publication will not have been read by the students. Even the electronic news

services will go unnoticed, but a notation of a work schedule or social event change will bring an immediate response.

The previous statements also may apply to recent graduates or new arrivals in the business. The sense of connection to activities outside a person's zone often remains tenuous. They also lack understanding of the broader impact of the world around us and the subsequent impact on the cattle business.

Ultimately, the most immediate question for many young people in college is how to become involved in their family beef operation or a commercial beef operation. The positions are often limited, and if they are available, the pay is not attractive when compared with salaries within the agricultural sector as a whole.

In addition, there is a constant give-and-take between current management techniques and future management techniques a student learns in college. The integration of new knowledge and the subsequent managerial techniques from one generation to the next is generally difficult. The question is much more pronounced today than in previous years and is driven by the sheer momentum of dollars and value within the beef industry.

Young people once again are asking to come in and have the opportunity to take over the reins of the cattle industry. They are excited to have the chance to do what those who have come before them have done: 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 the school year begin!

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.

What a Way to Start the School Year

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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.