



BeefTalk 638: True Thanksgiving Never is Divided

SUPPORTING MATERIALS



A challenge that seems to float persistently within the beef industry is the concept that something always is better than something else or one way is right and one way is wrong.

There is so much to be thankful for. If one is doubtful, one only needs to mall watch, or in simple terms, watch people. The day-to-day bustle of people reminds us that we have lists we set out to fulfill.

For most, that hustle is a thankful hustle. We are thankful for all that we have and the ability to seek what is on our lists.

Those involved in the beef industry are no different. We are thankful for the ability to experience and live that experience within the beef industry, so we are thankful, but. It is that “but” that always seems to add just an extra thought or slight jab. A challenge that seems to float persistently within the beef industry is the concept that something always is better than something else or one way is right and one way is wrong.

Early on, we were instructed to pick the best heifer, bull, cow or, on a rare day, best horse. If a cat or dog was to be had, the pick of the litter always was noted.

Never does one bring home just a load of calves. The calves have to be the best of the day. Everything is always one up. In the end, this dynamic feel of internal competition, which is the need to be the best, still seems to prevail.

We are not here to resolve all the world’s problems. We are not here to determine the best that truly will make the world a better place. If we get a little big-headed, all we need to do is review the efforts of those who tried. Short-term may have been good, but in the long-term, much like the dinosaurs and other interesting worldly phenomena, the Earth won and the people lost.

The question today is much narrower and more pointed. When you look at the wonderful world of beef and all the great



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people involved in the industry, why do we spend so much time debating each other? What is better, black or red? It's as if one gene in one pathway really makes a big difference. Are speckled or roan cattle really that much different than solid-colored cattle? If I choose to raise large cows or small cows, what difference does it make?

If I want to buy purebred bulls or crossbred bulls, is that reason enough to be uninvited to a branding? If I simply like those cattle that stand a little taller, should I really gripe about the short-legged cows? If I choose to drive a tractor and feed corn, am I really better than someone who bases his or her operation solely on grass? If I choose to want the cows to calve in winter, why shouldn't I? For that matter, what if I want the cows to calve in the spring, summer or fall?

If I like to buy high-growth bulls versus low-growth bulls, why shouldn't I? If I would rather gather the cows with a horse, four-wheeler, pickup truck or not at all, shouldn't that be my choice? If I want to listen to a cowhand, ranch owner, buyer, feed lot manager or an academic, is that not my right? If I want to raise cattle to market beef, should I not be proud of what is put on the plate, regardless of who is going to consume the meal? Can we not all gather around the campfire, coffee table, country store, fast-food restaurant, brand-name steakhouse or simply the family table and share our stories as beef producers, not beef competitors?

I believe we call this the beef industry. I believe we are a great business that is equitable to all. We should not waste time and resources placing cattle, producers, operations or others involved in the many niches this industry has in keep or cull exercises.

For a group of people who do not like to be told what to do, if we are not careful, we sure can spend a lot of time critiquing what everybody else is doing. I suppose one could say that is judgmental of me. The point is that daily life is pretty good, so we all should be very thankful for what we have and even for what we don't have.

We need to be reminded to enjoy what we have because tomorrow everything may change. There are no guarantees, so I am thankful for the privilege to work in this industry. I certainly am even more thankful for the great diversity of cattle, operations, producers and beef systems.

After all, mall watching is something most of us can relate to. As we take a rest at the mall, we can sit and watch all the people around us doing whatever it is they are doing. The variety is what makes mall watching fun. Each individual is unique and expresses life in ways that are reflective of that life.

The same holds true of all those involved in the beef business. As is every day, today is a great day to give thanks for all that we have and all that others have. It is a day to give thanks for the fact that we can sit and ponder and actually say what we think.

May you find all your ear tags.

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