



## BeefTalk 657: One-way Ticket to Town

### SUPPORTING MATERIALS



*For those producers who manage bull pens, caution always should be taken prior to entering the pen.*

Bull 50 just bought himself a one-way ticket to town. For bulls, there are only two pens. One is the pen for breeding bulls, while the other bulls go to the “for beef market” pen.

I climbed over a fence instead of using the standard gate to enter one of the bull pens. However, Bull 50 decided that was not acceptable. In a fraction of a second, Bull 50 was on me. There is no lack of understanding when one comes face to face with a bull that is seeking dominance. He is the boss, so, in this case, I needed to move. I took the quick exit and scaled the fence.

Although Bull 50 won the moment, I won the event. By that afternoon, Bull 50 was on a trailer heading to town destined

for the next day’s market. Market beef would become Bull 50’s new name.

Although the need to anchor the business of beef in data and numbers is real, there always is room for discussion because many day-to-day activities are producer and ranch dependent.

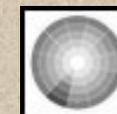
One such point is temperament. The Dickinson Research Extension Center tries to have a zero tolerance for challenging temperaments. Interestingly, oftentimes those closest to the cattle are more sympathetic than those who are more distant or perhaps not down in the chutes. There are excuses, but the bottom line is that aggressive temperament by a bull can’t be tolerated.

Bull 50 was a good 2-year-old, at least by the numbers. He was selected based on excellent marbling and rib eye traits and certainly was a good carcass bull. Those are critical traits when cattle are fed out because ranch profit is a function of harvest value. That all changed when bull 50’s eyes met mine. The look was not good.

For those producers who manage bull pens, caution always should be taken prior to entering the pen. Why today and why me? One will never know. The DREC ranch manager was with me, so Bull 50 had a choice. Perhaps what saved us was that moment of thought by Bull 50 deciding which one of us to go after. We got a head start while Bull 50 pondered.



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Events such as this bring back many memories of tragedy, particularly in the dairy business.

The headline read, "Local dairy producer killed by herd bull." These stories are fewer today, particularly in the dairy business, because of the increased use of artificial insemination. In fact, most dairies would not even need to have a dairy bull on the premises.

The truth is, as producers tend to their bulls, they become part of the bulls' pecking order. More kindness, caring and scratching of the head only make matters worse. The bull slowly adapts to the caregiver as one of the gang. Even if the bull does not mean to, that fateful day simply is a function of a 2,000-pound or more animal picking a fight with a 160-pound-plus person. Guess who wins?

Bull 50 was not kidding. The snort, look of the eyes, deliberate focused movement, tossing of the head without losing eye contact and pawing of the ground were strong signs of aggression. It could have been worse because one of the hands could have walked in the pen alone to feed the bulls. With back turned and concentrating on dumping feed, the ranch hand would not know what was about to happen. One would rather not think about that happening. Instead, send out a reminder never to enter a bull pen without due caution and diligence.

Winning the fight with a bull will not happen. Anyway, Bull 50 is now market beef and the price probably will be slightly above \$100 per hundredweight. That is good, and at least the day was not all about medical expenses. The point is that cattle do not pay for medical bills very well, and they do not sit around talking about estate taxes or who takes over once the boss is gone.

Cattle don't care and only respond to cues that trigger behavior. If attacked, they will retreat or maybe choose to defend. In moving cattle, those who teach cattle movement will use those behavioral cues to be better cattle handlers. However, one never knows the day or time when a bull, cow with a newborn calf or a just plain ornery critter decides this is the day to challenge that two-legged critter who comes to the pen every day.

Bull 50 stood his ground today, but, fortunately, the outcome was good. The bottom line is to not keep aggressive cattle. On a side note, Bull 50 was a little aggressive when the center purchased him, but we needed an extra bull. In the pen next to Bull 50 was Bull Y1199, who was another high-headed, very nervous bull, but younger. He also went to town.

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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