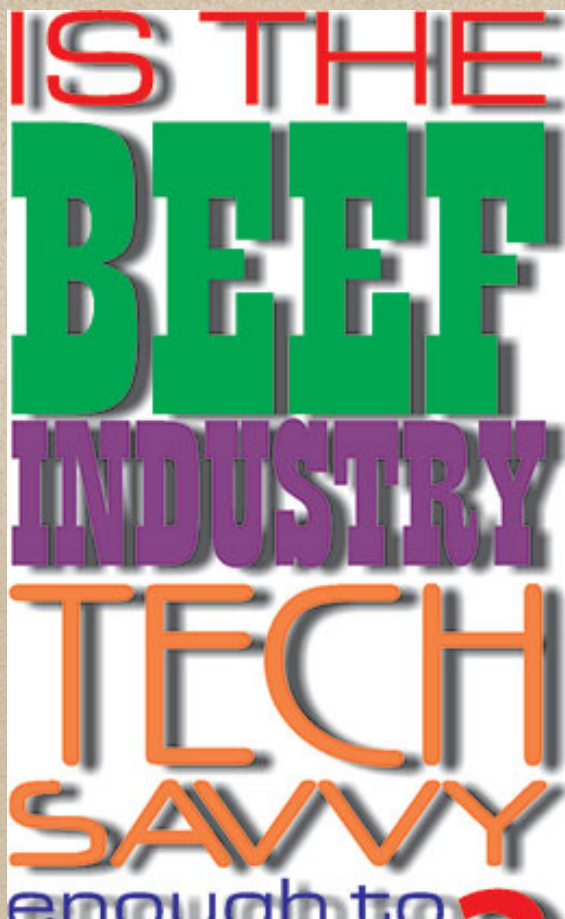




BeefTalk 663: How Do We Get the Next Generation to Raise Beef?

SUPPORTING MATERIALS



How is the beef industry going to move forward and not become a short reflection in an old history book?

“Cattle and crops: Together we stand, divided we fall.” Among the numerous commentaries on agriculture, is that really true?

The other day, I had a major flashback. I climbed in a new tractor and sat down. I had this unearthly feeling that I was sitting in the cockpit of a major jet. Sophisticated would be an understatement. There was nothing remaining of the controls I used to know well.

The flashback put me in the seat of an International 806 tractor with no cab, pulling a John Deere combine with a long-forgotten model number. The field was an average field of barley with the windrows running west to east. A strong wind was blowing from the west and the day was a typical hot, late-afternoon harvest day.

Having waited most of the day for the grain to dry, Dad finally said it was time and I was to run the tractor and combine. I became a livestock specialist that day. The thought of any more time spent sitting on a tractor with no cab, trying to avoid the rough awns of a barley plant freshly separated from the seed, still sends shivers down my spine. There was no way to avoid the inevitable. Barley dust and chaff settled on my neck and slowly crept down my back. Ultimately, it spread to every square inch of my body and slowly mingled with my harvest sweat.

It was tolerable while driving straight. I was hunched over and keeping still while focusing on moving forward. However, when I had to turn the tractor, I had to move my arms and let go of



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my shirt collar, which caused the dust to pour down my back. Oh, the joys of farming in those days!

Sitting in the new tractor, I looked up at the air conditioner and dust filters. Shutting the door produced a whole new environment. It was an environment that I had never been in before. The flat-screen monitor was prominent and had several

color-coded pads that help operate the tractor.

I am sure the operators manual would explain in detail what each function was, although the radio controls and foot pedals still were recognizable. It was obvious that the tractor was environmentally and operator-friendly. One probably could add joy to the equation.

Somehow, my upbringing and the current world of farming are so disconnected that I almost could become a farmer, which is a world I bypassed in favor of cows and sheep. They seemed simpler and more welcoming than those old tractors, plows, combines and dusty grain bins.

Maybe it was the time my brother slammed my head between the auger motor and grain bin that sealed my farming fate. However, things have changed. My stay in the new tractor was not long. While getting off the tractor, I wondered why anyone would want to raise cattle or sheep when one could have this machine. Maybe the thought is misplaced or I am overstating, but that tractor was nice.

The future of the beef industry needs young people. Young people are technology driven and certainly understand the difference between nice and not so nice. Let me state again: Cattle and crops, together we stand, divided we fall. Among the numerous commentaries on agriculture, is that really true?

The economic pressure from added revenue from acres dedicated to crops versus cattle remains startling. The added dollar, even with the added expenses, draws young people into crop production. Those already involved in extensive crop production have no problem with expansion. The expansion comes through technology and engineering, and crop production uses it all.

Cattle production also could. The horse and saddle have not changed, but the chute side has. Technology-rich scales and tech-savvy ear tags are available but generally go unused. We still see the nice ranch pictures of people gathering at branding time. However, at the end of the day, most push their self-starting pickup keys and go back to town. They hope to be on time to catch up with the kids' activities. This is the world we live in.

Pondering is all right, but ranting is generally useless. However, how is the beef industry going to move forward and not become a short reflection in an old history book? Maybe the answer is like crop production. Sitting on one's laurels and enjoying the past will not position young people to meet the challenges of an evolving world.

While picking up a beef publication, my eyes found an article on how to get the next generation to eat beef. The program was commendable and certainly needed. Perhaps there is a bigger question: How do we get the next generation to raise beef? That question certainly needs to be addressed. Are we tech savvy enough to survive?

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.

