Pain Has No Value

By Kris Ringwall
Extension Beef Specialist
NDSU Extension Service

BEEF TALK

I came to the realization this heifer really did not want to be in the palpation crate after I received two solidly placed imprints of her hooves on both legs. I also received a subsequent slam of solid steel across my arm because the heifer successfully released the restraining bar meant to keep her contained.

In fact, the heifer really did not want to be in the alleyway, the holding pen or the sorting pen. On a routine outing a week earlier, the heifer made it well known she did not want to be in any structure resembling metal or wood.

This heifer simply wanted a life that integrated with other members of her own species. In the heifer's mind, all other living things are treated as predators. The heifer subscribes, with strong intent, to the concept of survival of the fittest.

One could wonder who is denser, me or the heifer, but there always seems to be that hope that the heifer really didn't mean what she implied. For this heifer, the conclusion from all of those involved is that she will not be pregnancy checked today. For all practical purposes, her next encounter with humans will be when she is removed from the replacement heifer group and moved to the feedlot.

The value of pain is zero, unless one wants to attribute some rudimentary form of education with the process. Learning from mistakes does have some value; however, in today's world, those educational mistakes may be too expensive when the medical, equipment and other associated downtime costs are calculated into the equation.

The bottom line, an injury on the job is extremely costly for all involved. Using proper safety precautions in a livestock operation is critical for the producer and the livestock involved. Unfortunately, dealing with livestock has high risks.

In this example, working heifers is always a challenge, at least for the first time. These heifers have really not seen humans, except for calf tagging and vaccinations. Just like us, most don't remember many details of the growing-up process.

For today, the heifers have to slowly become acquainted with their caretakers. Most do. In fact, with good selection and zero tolerance for bad temperament, most cattle operations have exceptionally well-mannered cattle. However, the learning phase, or should I say acclimation phase, still needs to be done.

The times are changing, and unfortunately for many producers, the readily available pool of young workers willing to help during the acclimation phase is getting smaller. For the producers, memories of those good old days of breaking horses and wrestling calves are best left as memories. Bones are bones, and with a little age, the bending equations need to be recalculated to modify the snapping point. As we get older, thoughts tend to drift more to the evening pain relief rather than dreaming of tomorrow's challenge.

A case in point, the current swing in the industry is bringing man and beast into environments they may not want to be in. All the king's men and all the king's horses could not put Humpty Dumpty together again. That is not a bad rhyme to reflect on as one enters the day's work.

The heifer was quick, her legs strong and had good aim. All that was left was to place her in contact with a human. Being that human, one does not forget the pain. One does not forget the slow and methodical feeling of evaluating the functionality of all that remains connected to the body, one bone or one muscle at time. Fortunately, everything checked out, the green lights came on and it's on to the next heifer. Life and work go on, but practice safety first.

May you find all your NAIS-approved ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at *www.BeefTalk.com*. For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to *www.CHAPS2000.com* on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0260.