

A Call to Arms Because the Rooster Crowed

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Attending the North Dakota Stockmen's Association annual meeting in Fargo was good. The meeting, as with all meetings, picked up the flavor of the region, a fact of life throughout the world.

It seems beef meetings are filled with good humor, with much of it directed at chickens. Unlike many ethnic stories, there is no offense taken to a good chicken joke among the beef folks.

In this case, egg laying Ginger was the center of attraction. Ginger starred in the movie "Chicken Run," a funny movie by Aardman Animations involving a flock of chickens bent on not becoming chicken pie. The chickens spent the majority of the movie developing and executing a plan to escape. In the end, they succeeded, met their goals and retired in paradise.

Perhaps there is a lesson in that brief statement, but I would like to make a broader point. The chicken and cow thing has been going on for some time. For the most part, the early settlers would have insisted on both, plus a milk cow, a sow and maybe sheep.

As time went on, the need or at least the desire to specialize negated the lack of competition. The result was a competitive atmosphere by those who have survived the process of presenting the consumer with something that fancies their palate. This is big business and the sparring within the world of meats began.

Today, looking the competition in the eye is very real. What seems interesting is that the poultry industry, like Ginger, has a plan. Al Kulenkamp of Shaver Poultry Breeding Farms Ltd. detailed the plan for egg layers in his article, "Profile of the Layer of 2010."

Kulenkamp says, "The layer in 2010 will be substantially improved, but not dramatically different. She will be capable of laying 12 to 15 more eggs of better quality ... and consume up to 8 grams less feed per egg. With improved breeding techniques, the 2010 layer will be better able to cope with group-type environments."

The opposition for beef has a plan, a goal and a pro-

cess to achieve that goal. They will.

Where are beef producers and the mighty beef cow? Do we have a plan that entwines increased production, better quality of product, more efficiency and increased flexibility to cope with environmental modification? Ginger may tolerate a little fun poked at her, but it is not at her expense. Rather, the fun is at the expense of the beef cow. Long-term planning works.

According to Kulenkamp, today's hens lay 50 or more eggs using 25 percent less feed compared with the hens of yesterday. Chicken breeders utilize consistent, long-term breeding strategies that not only produce change for the breeder, but for the entire commercial industry as well.

Yes, the beef cow has changed, but is there a plan to do what the chicken did? Can we increase production, quality, efficiency and positive environmental impacts?

All of these issues are addressed. In one room, the cow-calf people gather. The meats people are across the hall and the nutritionists will have their own meeting next week. The beef animal waste people had a call to arms, but no one attended the meeting, so the points were tabled.

Instead, the perceived "big" issues, such as animal identification and premises registration, are bubbling to the top. Meanwhile, we entertain ourselves with chicken jokes. Ginger is no joke. She had a plan, set her goals, got the flock to work as a unit and they all retired in paradise.

Our cows have a lot of work to do.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at www.BeefTalk.com. For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1041 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to www.CHAPS2000.com on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0320.



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