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## BeefTalk: Zero Tolerance for Bad Cows

**Never, never assume a cow will not harm you.**

By Kris Ringwall, Beef Specialist

NDSU Extension Service

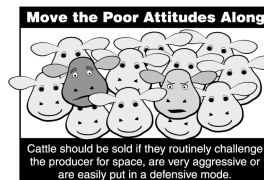
I apologize if the following words are too harsh, but they are true.

Unfortunately, some know the feeling all too well. The beef business has risks, and one risk is bad-tempered cows, cows that want to kill you.

Most cows respect their caregivers and have only goodwill. But for those of a different temperament, get them out of the pen. You should have no room in the pen for killer cows.

While calving time brings out maternal behaviors,

### Images



Move the Poor Attitudes Along - Cattle should be sold if they routinely challenge the producer for space, are very aggressive or are easily put in a defensive mode.

## columns

**[BeefTalk: BeefTalk: Zero Tolerance for Bad Cows](#)** (2017-04-13) Never, never assume a cow will not harm you. [FULL STORY](#)

**[Prairie Fare: Prairie Fare: Grilled Fruits and Vegetables Add Flair to Your Menu](#)** (2017-04-13) Remember food safety first when grilling. [FULL STORY](#)

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acceptable behaviors always must include respect for the producer, the primary caregiver. Never, never assume a cow will not harm the very person who cares most for the cow - you; no exceptions.

The truth is the same for bulls, but at this time of year, the cow is the one which we, as producers, are interacting. Once again, never, never assume a cow will not harm you.

I was reminded of this the other night as I turned the corner to walk past the local recreational facility. I was met by several massive tigers. Fortunately, they each were in their cage. Long story short, I walked away. But I still was thinking that if a cage door had come open, what would I do? Let me repeat, they were big, full-grown tigers.

The tigers reminded me of how small I was and no match for a tiger or cow. The outcome would be the same.

An issue today is how we visualize the critters of the world. We view animals on electronic devices - cellphones, television or many other various monitors - in the safety of our home. The hazards are minimized on the devices and we can become haphazard, or take our safety for granted.

Through time, one develops a feel for the rogue cow or calf with a quick look or maybe an intense stare-down. Early signs exist regarding those animals that you just know are not going to be a

good co-habitation experience.

I remember, while working the cows in the solid handling facility, the last cow that came through. She made several attempts to leave, and tried to double-stack the chute, or in other words, push by the restraining gatekeeper and join the cow already in the chute. She indiscriminately and defensively kicked the chute wall.

She was diagnosed as pregnant, so now what? Keep or cull? Oddly enough, that would be debated in many cattle circles. I pondered, "If a producer always sorted into the trailer the last few heifers or cows to come through the chute, would life get simpler?" So, keep or cull? Those with adequate help (who have agility included in their job description) might consider keeping this cow. For those who are more "do it yourself," the answer sways toward culling.

Ask the business partner; the answer is "maybe." Ask the emergency response team; the answer is "cull." Ask the night calving crew; the answer is "cull." Ask the family; the answer is "cull." Then ask, "Why is she still here?"

In reality, ornery cattle are just ornery and have no business in the cattle population. They are dangerous.

Is behavior or temperament passed on from one generation to the next? Absolutely. Can producers select for mild-mannered cattle? Absolutely. Can

producers control the destiny of their herd's attitude? Absolutely. Should bull breeders castrate the bull calf with an obvious attitude? Absolutely.

Quit making excuses for bad-tempered cattle. Some say they are just scared and want to get away. Some say the issue is the producer. I say, just work with cattle that work for you, not against you.

The question often asked is what to look for, and the answer is this: Cattle that routinely challenge the producer should be sold. Cattle that are very aggressive and are put in a defensive mode easily should be sold. Cattle that are overreactive to the chute environment should be sold.

Awhile back, the Dickinson Research Extension Center purchased a set of yearling steers for summer grazing that had no love for humans. Even as castrated males, their hatred for people and their desire to do bodily harm was real. And I am not making this up.

Having ultrasounded several thousand cows, nervous, high-strung cattle are obvious. One can obviously feel the tense, nervous cow, rigid on the outside but shaking on the inside. She needs to go.

When buying bulls, ask questions on bull attitude and, for heaven's sake, don't buy temperamental bulls that challenge the fitting crew, the handling crew, the sale crew or, in the worst-case situation,

the buyers. Bulls with an attitude can be neutered and placed in the feedlot well before sale time.

Mysticism surrounds the concept of conquering the wild and taming the untamable. But let's leave that to others. Friends and family like us to come home, and so we should, safely.

Of course, you have another side to this story: the overly tame cow, or particularly a tame bull.

Respect is still the appropriate response.

Remember those rare stories when someone adopts a tiger and assumes the tiger is a big pet.

No, it is not.

The "tame" bull has taken too many lives. Always respect cattle; care for them, but be safe.

May you find all your ear tags.

For more information, contact your local NDSU Extension Service agent

(<https://www.ag.ndsu.edu/extension/directory>) or

Ringwall at the Dickinson Research Extension Center, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601;

701-456-1103; or [✉kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu](mailto:kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu).

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source:	Kris Ringwall, 701-456-1103, <a href="mailto:kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu">✉kris.ringwall@ndsu.edu</a>
editor:	Ellen Crawford, 701-231-5391, <a href="mailto:ellen.crawford@ndsu.edu">✉ellen.crawford@ndsu.edu</a>

## Attachments



[PDF - Move the Poor Attitudes Along -](#)

[Cattle should be sold if they routinely challenge the producer for space, are very aggressive or are easily put in a defensive mode.](#) 

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