



BeefTalk 684: The Prairie is a Difficult Place to Call Home

SUPPORTING MATERIALS



All producers are neighbors when trouble arrives.

There are times in this world when we all need to stop, take a deep breath and reflect. Death on the prairies is never easy, but it is all too real. We were reminded again of the forces of Mother Nature this past week. What can one say?

All producers are neighbors when trouble arrives, even though distance may prevent the physical touch, but the thoughts and desires are very real. In this case, an early winter blizzard preceded by a driving, cold rain was too much even for strong, mature cows.

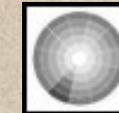
The pasture checks after the storm confirmed the extensive loss of cattle, fences, open pasture and watering holes. Even the buttes were unwanted resting places for weary or dead cattle.

Those of us on the prairie are familiar with this precarious relationship with Mother Nature, where control is never given by her and uncertainty is always present. Mother Nature has it all: cold, wind, rain, snow, ice, fire, heat and dryness, along with numerous combinations.

The challenge of cleanup is difficult. Death, although not a topic anyone really wants to discuss at length, is part of life and never timely. The surviving cow herd seems somewhat oblivious because the cattle already are grazing on the freshly



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cleaned pasture. This is not so for the producer.

General discussions on the practical side seem to be overwhelming but, with help, get done. There are potential scenarios, and lots of questions and thoughts, but gradually, through time, the slow process of trying to understand the fragility we all have in this life sets in. However, we still suffer. After some time, there is acceptance and, like the

cows that returned to grazing, we, too, move on. However, it is not simple or easy.

Standing on a hilltop, there is a slight breeze during a remarkably nice, sunny day following the storm, so lots of thoughts come to mind. The surviving cattle have the essentials of food, water and a dry environment. The well-cared-for herd stands by and continues normal activity.

Winter weather moving across the prairies is tough to manage. There is no antidote, vaccination or any other help. Producers do their best, apply as much common sense as possible and keep moving. The prairie always has been tough because of the vastness of life and, for producers, the caring for those lives entrusted to them.

You can tell by the hands, so always look at the hands. These are not the soft hands that use a keyboard like I do. These are the rough hands of producers. These are the hands that have pulled calves, thrown hay bales, changed sickle bars, replaced tires or carried many a bucket of grain.

Through time, we all have our share of bumps and bruises and even received a star-producing head knock. Those who raise livestock know all too well the fragility of life, despite the tough outer shell. Tough hands and tough tears because not all the cows got checked and there is little time to recoup.

During times like this, my memory remembers picking up an egg that was about to hatch. Like next year's calves that will emerge, coming from that egg was a new life that was unknowing of these past, wicked days. Earlier in the day, the young chick, with all its might, started breaking through from the only life it had ever known. There was no reason to know otherwise because the youngster had been well cared for and all its needs met.

However, the young chick kept on pecking. First a crack, then a second crack, a split and finally a hole. Through that hole came the most beautiful light the youngster had ever seen, so the pecking continued. With unending persistence, the youngster turned within the egg, with only faith that a better life existed on the other side. As the outer shell began to give, the youngster stretched with the power of Samson. Gradually, the egg gave way in my hand and, with toes clenching the large half of the egg, the youngster gave a final thrust and was free.

Blind, unending faith brought the youngster from the security of the egg to the vastness of a new world. While in my hand, the chick had no knowledge of how tough this life can be. The chick only had the brightness of a new life and was ready, willing and able to secure tomorrow's future.

Our tears are morning dew to a chick that has nowhere to go but up. However, there will be some tough days ahead. For producers, the future will be secure, fall roundups will continue, and next spring's calving will bring smiles to our faces, but there will be some tough days ahead. We are caregivers, so any loss of those in our care hurts.

Yes, the prairies are tough, so it's all right to mourn, shed tears, ponder and to question, but most importantly, as caregivers, it will be OK.

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.

