



BeefTalk 735: A Time to Reflect and Ponder

SUPPORTING MATERIALS



The night drive across western North Dakota was quite interesting. I remembered all the times I had driven these roads hoping to see another car.

It was a time to reflect during a trip home to help Dad. After 91 years on the farm, he was moving to an assisted living facility. The night drive across western North Dakota was quite interesting. I remembered all the times I had driven these roads hoping to see another car.

Things have changed. The day does not end at sunset anymore because the energy industry just keeps going, so I actually was hoping I wouldn't see another car or truck. The continuous traffic certainly is a change, but with the straighter and wider roads, the drive was not bad.

For those who know western North Dakota, driving north and south means crossing country that historically was isolated and had limited access at times. The interstate road system seemed to provide a better way to bypass these rough and tough areas. A lot of the old is changing and so is the beef industry.

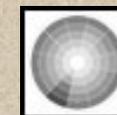
I had to bypass my presentations to the North Dakota Stockmen's Association so I could help Dad. The presentations presented new ideas on incorporating chute-side records with current communication technology.

I also was going to discuss the Dickinson Research Extension Center's opportunity to purchase land to help integrate cow genomics and efficiency evaluations in an extensive ranch

business. The integration of super modern data collection techniques that offer the opportunity to evaluate cattle often are limited to pens. However, the center, in collaboration with the NDSU Animal Sciences Department, is



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expanding efforts to include continued evaluations in an extensive range setting. It's exciting stuff.

I was driving home knowing that Dad needed to give up his 91-year reign on the farm. Not easy. Sometimes these sparkling, new opportunities we have need to acknowledge those who have gone before us.

I can remember our first cattle; at least they were the first for me. They were Red Poll cattle and Dad milked them. The old hip-roofed barn really was a stanchion barn, and every cow had its place and knew the routine. There was the morning milking that was followed by letting the cows out and cleaning the barn and filling the feed bunks. Later, we gathered the cows for the evening milking.

During the winter, Dad would put coal in the iron water heater to thaw the water tank and allow the cows to drink. The cows never were left outside. In later years, Mom would recall her dislike of the smell of fresh milk. When asked why, she would recall the hours spent running warm milk through the cream separator, which was followed by the meticulous cleaning of those metal plates that would separate the cream from the milk.

The milk and cream would go to the local creamery. With time, the milk went to the pigs and the cream was sold. Eventually, Dad quit milking, sold the calves and went from Red Poll cows to Angus. It seemed like a logical transition.

A friend dropped off a book his mother had. The title was "Approved Practices in Beef Cattle Production" and had a 1951 copyright. A lot has changed since 1951, but not everything. Cattle management and common sense certainly were in sync then and still are today.

Dad understood that the well-being of his cattle was important but lacked the tools we have today to remedy many of the common ailments. Expanding our knowledge of cattle diseases and developing improved pharmaceuticals, plus integrating new technology, essentially has rid the industry of the pests that plagued Dad as he raised livestock.

Paging through the book brought back memories of cattle grubs, flies, black leg, parasites and other maladies that seldom make coffee talk today. That is good. However, the frontier spirit of those who plowed the ground before us does cause me to ponder. Is the spirit still there or have we become rather dependent on instantaneous and assumed fixes? A quick click on the Web and our solutions will come.

There is no denying the improvements that are at our fingertips today, but I know that Dad had good roots. He may not have known all that we know today, but storm after storm, year after year, his roots grew. With all that was thrown at him, he survived, raised a family, made friends and came to understand that we all have a place in a world that is not ours.

That place is real and we do our best, but in the end, we all must come to settle with our maker. The settling may take time, but perhaps that is all we need. It is time to ponder, to appreciate and to smile while realizing that all those still trying to figure things out will join Dad. Not the other way around.

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.

