



.....STRAIGHT FROM THE HORSES MOUTH

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I am not quite sure how to start this edition out. As I start writing this week's edition it is officially May Day. Now that may not mean much to some people, but it does bring back some good memories from my much younger years. May baskets, flowers and the old tradition of hanging flowers and/or baskets of flowers and goodies on the doorknob or on the porch of friends and neighbors, ring the doorbell and run. It's the nice version of "Ding Dong –Ditch". For others that I talked to they had a different version that if the neighbor catches you, you will get a kiss. That sounds rather risky, but I am sure it was most likely young people who this applied to. I can about imagine some junior high kids perpetrating this exercise. Gosh, I don't remember that being part of our tradition. I am not quite sure how I would have reacted if it was!

May Day also kicks off National Beef Month! From cattle farmers & ranchers to feed manufacturers and processors, thousands of people play an important role in beef's journey from pasture to plate. It's the state's single largest industry and the engine that powers the state's economy. The multiplied impact of the \$6.5 billion in cattle sales each year is \$12.1 billion. Cattle-related employment means income for businesses up and down the main streets in towns and cities all across the state. In short, the beef cattle industry has an unmistakable impact on other economies in Nebraska. With 20,000 beef cow operations and over 1.88 million head of beef cows; 4,570 cattle feeding operations statewide (with only 770 feeding operations larger than 1,000 head); 5.1 million cattle fed and marketed per year - that combine to give us on average 2.3 million head of cattle on feed. That is what goes into making Nebraska number one in the nation in: 1) commercial red meat, 2) all cattle on feed, 3) commercial cattle slaughter, 4) commercial cattle slaughter and 5) beef & veal exports.

The importance of cattle feeding to Nebraska's economy runs deeper than in other states. Nearly 5 million head are finished and marketed in Nebraska, a state with a population of 1.8 million residents. It may also interest you that Nebraska is home to the top three beef cow counties in the U.S., including the nation's No. 1 cow county – Cherry County, with nearly 166,000 cows. Custer County is No. 2 (100,000) and Holt County is No. 3 (99,000). Also among the top counties in the nation is Lincoln County at No. 12 (69,000). Nebraska continues to have far more cattle than people. Cattle outnumber Nebraskans nearly 4 to 1. Cows number 1.94 million, versus Nebraska residents who number just 1.8 million. The cows and the 4.7 million head that are annually fed in Nebraska total nearly 6.64 million cattle. Do you wonder why my pickup sports a "Nebraska – the Beef State" license plate. I do because I am proud of our heritage and the beef industry.

Nebraska's farmers and ranchers take pride in what we do and we do it right. Regardless of the size or type of beef operation they run, one thing that Nebraska cattlemen have in common is the quality of care these animal stewards provide for their livestock. Just like someone in the accounting industry may be good with numbers, cattle producers are good with cattle and enjoy their work. For Nebraska beef producers, it is a business, but more importantly, it is a way of life and ranchers do what they do because they love the outdoors and their animals. They are committed to providing the best care possible for their livestock and providing a healthy and humanely-raised product for consumers.

Beef producers have long recognized the need to properly care for livestock and take particular pride in this responsibility. They have for the most part passed on animal care principles from generation to generation. Personal experience, training and professional judgment all serve as valuable resources for providing this care. But beef producers don't just rely on those qualifications, they also rely on science. They lean heavily on research that has provided additional information that can supplement experience and in the quest for continual improvement in the cattle industry. Research provided by the University of Nebraska, UNL Extension Research and Extension Centers, USDA Meat Animal Research Center and the Great Plains Veterinary and Education Center provide the basis for many day-to-day decisions about animal husbandry here in Nebraska. Sound animal husbandry practices, based on decades of practical experience and research are known to impact the well-being of cattle, individual animal health and herd productivity.

All of the beef programs that I have worked with over the years are tradition proven, science-based and common-sense driven. As such, the cattle industry in Nebraska and all across this great nation continues their commitment to proper care and handling of their livestock. Most cattlemen will tell you that animal care is their first priority on a daily basis. Beef producers are passionate and dedicated to the care of their animals, and are concerned about the consuming public that is receiving mixed messages about animal care and welfare and downright lies and misconceptions that are used for agendas – at the expense of these caring individuals who contrary to what you would hear – the very first environmentalists!

All of this is why I become fired up when people attack our industry or simply denigrate it. I have written on several occasions about one such player - Chipotles' Mexican Grill - who this next Monday will operate on a new marketing tool. You can go to their website <http://chipotle.com/gmo> and find their new slogan, "Food With Integrity - G-M-Over It" which is basically saying that Chipotle's menu is now free of "GMO ingredients?" This combined with all the vitriol that they have waged on farming and the beef industry is just one more example. I could write several pages on that alone but I encourage you instead to read the article entitled "*Hey, Chipotle! Don't Look Now, But It's 'Turtles All the Way Down!'*" which can be found at: www.innovationfiles.org/author/valgiddings/ I will close by simply saying "Nebraska Beef Rocks!"

The preceding information comes from the research and personal observations of the writer which may or may not reflect the views of UNL or Nebraska Extension. For more further information on these or other topics contact D. A. Lienemann, Nebraska Extension Educator for Webster County in Red Cloud, (402) 746-3417 or email to: dlienemann2@unl.edu or go to the website at: <http://www.webster.unl.edu/home>