



Beef Talk

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Are your facilities ready to cull bulls?

The marketing of cull cows and bulls certainly falls into the “need to get it done” category.

Producers eventually will have to go through the cows and bulls and market those that no longer meet production criteria. If truth be told, late summer or early fall would be a good time. However, like many operations, the long to-do list of items seems to force some things to be set aside.

The good weather this year, at least in the northern tier of the country, has allowed many producers to do considerable facility work. Fixing up all those corrals and working facilities from the last time the cattle were rounded up is high on the list.

Lots to do and only a few hardy souls around to get the job done could be one of the downfalls in the ranching community. For many operators, each task needs to be prioritized, knowing well that delays often mean missing a timely market niche. At that time, the missed opportunity is mentally noted, added to the expense column with invisible ink, and life goes on.

Ready or not

It goes without a lot of explanation that selling cows and bulls as market cow and bull beef is inevitable.

When is the best time? Generally not when you are ready, but, nonetheless, the trucks arrive. The sorting, grouping and resorting are much more of a challenge in the cow-calf scenario than the traditional feedlot that has great alleys, neat work facilities and pens that are made to hold a sorted set of cattle.

In contrast, wired-up panels and steel posts bought at the local supply store always leave something to be desired. Perhaps that is why an occasional snakelike cow never gets to market. She just seems to know how to avoid the trap and sometimes will take a few of her cohorts with her.

We hear the occasional “What the ...!” as cowhands are seen running somewhere. “What the ...!” is generally followed by “Who didn’t ...!” Oh well, most of the cows get sorted and re-sorted or at least noted, and the coffee is cordial.

The bulls are about the same, provided they are in agreement with what

you want to do. It’s not so much that they dislike the presence of people, although there are bulls that do dislike people being around.

For the most part, bulls dislike the presence of another bull that seems to be challenging the established pecking order. Two bulls that are out of place means something is going to happen. The pecking order needs to be and will be re-established and made proper. The initial arched neck, dropped head, inflated nostrils and low bellow generally mean back off or else.



Remodeling the pen

Out in the pasture, the best approach is to back off until everything settles down. Not true if the bulls are being moved into new surroundings, such as unfamiliar pens or some of those fine, homespun working facilities. Generally, the challenged bull has nowhere to turn, and the challenging bull has no way to change his mind, so the fight is on.

The initial swing is not too bad because no harm is intended. However, the first wave of bystanders, cows and cowhands are brushed aside, so open space appears. Most posts and panels

are cleared away immediately, and the remnants scattered as if a Category 5 tornado has hit.

In a meager attempt to help resolve the conflict using the keen idea of separation, the gate is swung open with the hope that one bull will leave. As both bulls head out with their only intent to

conquer the other, more tussles occur as both bulls swing sideways and knock out both 6-inch-square gate posts at ground level.

At this point, the only prayer is for open range. However, more likely what happens is a progressive explosion of posts, timbers, feedbunks and notable landmarks. The bulls eventually play out and seem to settle their differences with some reasonable coaxing.

The ranch hands hope that next fall is as good as this one, so more time can be put into fixing things up before shipping day next fall. The suggestion is to buy some of those good 8-inch posts, but some things just cycle, such as “breakin’” and “fixin’.”

About that time, the boss comes by and suggests that maybe we should put a little gain on those critters before we ship them. “What the ...!”

