

Sometimes you gotta wonder ...

It's interestin' to watch folks buy bulls. I often wonder what they are thinkin'. How much is it worth to get good calves?

You know grass in our country costs a lot. I have some listed for a lot more than it ever will pay out. Pasture rent is worth a lot of money also. If you want to graze yearlin's, it can pay a lot of the time. If you want to graze cows, well, there are places you can raise calves cheaper.

At the livestock auction where I'm workin', good 500- to 600-pound (lb.) steers are sellin' for 'bout a dollar or more a pound, and folks won't give \$1,200 for a good bull with EPD (expected progeny difference) information that is reliable.

We had a special cow and bred-heifer sale last Saturday (I'm writin' this in December). We sold some good pairs for better than \$1,000 and some not-so-good cows for \$600-\$750. How do you get it to sink in on folks? Some folks may not be right, but they are darn sure never in doubt. Think 'bout it.

My ex-mother-in-law (not the one I have now, bless her) is sort of like that. She is like some of them cows that come in the ring lookin' fer somebody to ... well, let's just say "horn in on their business." Not only are they

hard to get along with, but they ain't the kind that raise the best calves, usually. My wife says I'm treadin' on thin ice with that comment. I'd better not pursue that deal any further.

Back to my point. You know how most columnists are. They are kind of like politicians. They have a point over here, a point over there and a lot of bull in the middle.

You know what they call a hundred politicians at the bottom of the ocean? A good start! After what we have gone through during this last election, we might ought to go to the lumberyard for some log chain and cinder blocks. At his retirement dinner, Sen. Alan Simpson from Wyoming said that someone had told him when he first came to Washington, D.C., that if he wanted a friend there, he should've brought his dog. Sounds like a cozy place, don't it?

Clinton said he was behind Gore all the way. Mr. Gore, if you want some good advice, keep that guy in front of you where you can keep an eye on him.

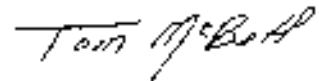
Politicians are kind of like a passel of cats with the scours. You know, it takes several to dig holes and several more to cover things up and more yet lookin' for new ground to keep

the smell from gettin' too rank.

The whole situation is also a real big help for all the TV newspeople. You ever notice how they look so serious? I bet they are gigglin' all the way to the bank over this whole thing 'cause they now have somethin' to keep 'em busy for a while. Like that poor ol' guy that hauled 168 boxes of Florida ballots to Tallahassee. Even when he made a pit stop along the road, they kept the cameras on him. I'm kind of surprised the poor guy didn't moon the whole bunch of 'em. I know that comment was kind of in poor taste, but gee, give the guy a break. For that matter, give the whole country a break.

OK, back to the point ... really. I guess we have got to get more folks to buy better bulls so they can sell better calves. It's funny how so many people want to top the market. However, they ain't willin' to make the choices to get that kind of calves. Oh well, you can lead a horse to water, but can't make him drink. Human nature, I guess. At least for part of humankind anyway.

Winter ain't close to bein' over, and I'm lookin' forward to spring already. Hope you have a good winter and the new year works out good for you. Take care, and God bless you.



Calving: Are your cows ready for it?

It is the closest thing to a sure bet in the cow-calf industry: Cows need to be in good body condition when they calve.

"Everything in terms of cow-calf production seems to work better when cows calve in excellent body condition," says Glenn Selk, Oklahoma State University (OSU) Extension specialist.

Research shows cows that calve in excellent body condition rebreed consistently on time for the subsequent year's calf crop. They also tend to produce more, higher-quality colostrum, which provides calves with an increased antibody protection to fight diseases and to withstand winter weather stresses.

"Cows in better body condition have a higher percentage calf crop born and a higher percent that live until weaning time," Selk says. "Producers are able to wean more pounds of calf per cow in the herd, which translates to more profit potential."

The OSU Cow Body Condition Scoring System rates cows on a scale of 1 through 9, with 1 representing an animal that is essentially skin and bones and 9 representing an extremely obese animal.

A body condition score (BCS) of 6 is optimum for rebreeding performance, Selk says. Cows of BCS 6 will exhibit a smooth appearance. The loin, hip and tail head will be smooth and rounded.

Spring-calving operations mandate substantial feed requirements from purchased feeds or cool-season grasses if good body condition on pregnant cows is to be maintained throughout colder, harsher winter months.

He says some people have a perception that fall calving requires more-expensive supplemental feed be given to cows that are lactating throughout the entire winter.

"Many spring-calving operations start calving in late January and February," Selk says. "Therefore, those cows are lactating during much of the winter anyway. In fact, there seem to be some distinct advantages to fall calving in Oklahoma."

Fall-calving cows that give birth in September and October consistently are in excellent body condition because they have been on pasture without nursing a calf the last half of the summer.

"Cows that are eating high-quality forage the last part of summer without having to provide milk to calves obviously are going to be able to store the extra nutrients as additional body condition," Selk says.

Extra body condition at calving enables a cow to return to estrus sooner, which in turn increases the opportunities for a successful rebreeding program. In addition, research shows cows that start cycling before the breeding season tend to have more uniform calf crops.

"Fall-born calves are weaned in early to midsummer, a time when annual calf prices generally are 4% higher per pound (lb.) than calves weaned in late October or early November," Selk says.

"Put all the fall-calving advantages together, and producers potentially should have more pounds of calf to sell at a time of the year when there are fewer calves being marketed."

Additional information on spring and fall calving is available online at <http://cowcalfcorner.okstate.edu>.

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