

The Grazier



Angus producer honored at NCA

Leroy Baldwin, Ocala, Fla., is the 1987 recipient of the "Innovative Application of New Technology in Beef Cattle Production Award." This National Cattlemen's Assn. award, sponsored by the IBP Foundation, is given each year to an individual or group that exemplifies the use of modern technology - on the practical level - to improve beef cattle production.

In 1978, Baldwin began an efficient forage production and utilization system for his purebred Angus cattle operation.

In Florida's subtropical climate, Coastal Bermuda grass grows most rapidly during the summer months when afternoon thundershowers are frequent. Harvesting and preserving this grass at a stage of maturity when it has a high nutrient content has been a problem for ranchers. Baldwin's use of a silage bagger to harvest rained-on hay and to maintain a four-to five-week cutting schedule for optimum quality, is a significant innovation.

Additionally, in 1979 he started developing a unique and efficient system of adding anhydrous ammonia uniformly to the bags as they are filled. The system allows the bags to be filled with very little loss and obtains uniform distribution of the forage within the bag.

Baldwin has also designed a self-feeding gate put at the end of the bag when opened. The cattle push it back as they consume the haylage, requiring a minimum of labor.

A strain of crimson clover has been developed, through grazing management, that's adapted to the ranch and reseeds itself each year. The clover supplies a source of high quality green feed for the cow herd and nitrogen for next year's grass.

Forage is the major cost item in most beef cattle operations. Efficient utilization of forage resources is one of the keys to an economically successful operation. Baldwin's system of salvaging forage that would be lost, or poor quality at best, as a high quality feedstuff through ensiling and ammoniation gives him an economic advantage in the cost of production. The production of a winter supplement for the cow herd by legume crop reseeding itself further reduces feed costs.



Leroy Baldwin, left, of Ocala, Fla., was honored at this year's convention of the National Cattlemen's Association with the IBP "Innovative" award. He's shown with Mrs. Baldwin and NCA Foundation President W.F. 'Dub' Mattin.

Forage production is not the only area where Baldwin applies technology. Most of the breeding herd is artificially inseminated, and Baldwin Angus Ranch has been performance testing since 1963. The efficient feeding system has helped the ranch become recognized as having one of the top producing cow herds both in pounds of calf weaned and regularity of calving.

Baldwin has been active in several industry related organizations. He was a director of the Florida Cattlemen's Association for many years and is now serving as its secretary. He has exported cattle to Central and South America and is president of the Florida International Agricultural Trade Council.

Baldwin was selected by a special committee, with the award presentation by George Spencer, vice president of public affairs, IBP.

Countering "Yes, buts"

By Willy Kilmer, Merriam, Kansas

In a recent column I insulted our cattle feeding industry over the amount of feed we hauled to our livestock at great expense while a tremendous quantity of feed was being wasted which could have been utilized in a well-planned grazing program.

I understand some feeders felt I had taken a shot at them. I hope none took serious offense.

It just seems to me that we're not paying serious attention to some of our opportunities. The opportunity to lower costs by adopting a controlled rotational grazing program seem to me to be self-evident. When this cost saving is discussed with various people in agribusiness, however, a large dose of the "yes, buts" occurs. There is general agreement we need to lower costs but this cost cutting should only apply to someone else's product or service. "Yes, but," the conversation goes, you need to take advantage of my antibiotic, growth promoter, mineral, breed, feed, seed, chemical, enzyme, equipment, gadget, widget, or whatever. "Yes, but," the data show the improvement you will get is significant to the fourth decimal. Not just significant, but statistically significant. A small explanation is needed.

Statistically significant" means that the showee's product won the test. "Not statistically significant" means that his didn't win, but the difference was so small you should buy from him because he's a nice guy.

A "poorly conducted test" is one in which the controls outperformed all of the products being tested.

Anyway, one report I saw annualized the savings of a particular product at 800 percent. It's hard to pass up a deal that good. Until recently, I understand many cattle coming out of feedlots were losing up to \$100 per head. They had had the advantage of every conceivable product and service. Either something isn't working as reported or these critters would have lost a lot more.

"Yes, but" the cattle industry can't afford to lose money indefinitely. "Yes, but" we have waited for a number of years for a price increase, "Yes, but" seven out of 10 cattle producers are using it. "Yes, but" we've always done it this way.

Perhaps as producers we need to develop our own set of "yes, buts. . . . "Yes, but" if I don't spend that money, I don't have to worry about getting it back. "Yes, but" I can grow my protein and nitrogen both with legumes. "Yes, but" the animals seem to stay more healthy when moved to fresh paddocks frequently. "Yes, but" if I don't take advantage of your free jacket or cap, maybe I'll save enough to buy one. "Yes, but" we have been friends for a long time. "Yes, but" if I go broke, I won't be able to pay you.

Epitomizing all of this is a case history out of Iowa. By rotationally grazing alfalfa, feed costs were 27 cents per pound compared to 51 cents for cattle in the lot on the same farm. "Yes, but" that is a tremendous difference. "Yes, but" it took some courage and foresight on the part of this individual. "Yes, but" the consumer wants leaner beef and that is what we produce with forages. "Yes, but" if I buy grass and legume seed and cross fencing, I only have to do so this year while most other expenses need to be repeated frequently. "Yes, but" I have to run. Time to open one gate and close another. See ya'.

Electric Fencing has merit

By Chuck Huseman, Cedar Lake, Indiana

In recent years there have many improvements and much progress made in the area of electric fencing. It probably would be safe to say more technology and innovation have been applied to the "science" of electric fencing than most other aspects of agriculture. And considering the advancement of ag technologies over the years, that's a lot of innovation.

Anyone who's ever owned or handled cattle surely has had experience with electric fence. Most of the experiences probably involved hours of chopping weeds from under hot wires, locating and replacing cracked and shorting insulators, or running cows out of corn fields after they'd escaped the electric barrier.

Also, much of that experience was likely gained in one's younger years and provided a reason for one to vow never to have to rely on electric fence as an adult. I can personally remember wondering why my father continued to use electric fencing, when I was young, when a lot of the "big time" cattle operations were using welded wire panels, woven wire, and even board fence around their pastures. It became much easier to understand after I started to pay the bills on my own operation. It's also interesting to note that many of the "big timers" have since gotten out of the cattle business, and there are large numbers of pastures that are surrounded by real pretty fencing but contain no cattle.

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That brings us to the major reason so much electric fence is in use. It's cheaper than any other equally effective fence.

This fact also helps explain why so many improvements have been made in the technologies involved in just the last few years. I like to compare the fencing business to the auto business in that respect.

In the recent past cars were built without too much regard for economy. One purchased a particular car because it looked good or because it was the brand that "Mom and Dad" always drove. Oh, there have always been Japanese cars available in this country, but only when gas first hit a dollar a gallon, did they really start to sell. In Japan, a car was built for transportation, and gas was always expensive.

The "Japan" of the fence business has been Australia and New Zealand. The livestock people of these countries have always had to fence great expanses of ground and do it inexpensively. As the ag economy slumped in this country, we began to look for ways to cut our livestock production costs and started to import, not only fencing products from Australia and New Zealand, but their fencing ideas and practices as well. After all, if a new "conventional" fence was going to add two dollars per head to a cow-calf man's fixed costs, and a "new technology" electric fence would only add 25 cents per head, it didn't take a computer to decide which fence to build.

The "new technology" electric fence components are now widely available but not as widely used. It seems that, as with cars, some people will stick to the same methods just because they are the methods "Dad" used.

The biggest difference, but certainly not the only difference, between old fashioned electric fence and the "new technology" fence is in the "energizer" or charger. Believe me, when I first saw a fence charger with a price tag of \$400, I was in a state of shock. Why, I could go right down to the Co-op and pick one up for \$35. What kind of fool did those New Zealanders take me for?

Well, there is a difference. That's not to say the most expensive charger is the best. It is just because that little box is the heart and soul of your electric fence and you should buy the best.

Which is the best? Now that gets just a bit complicated, but it is understandable if you grasp some basic concepts of electricity. In next month's article I will go into how to compare chargers. And, I'll try to explain why it's not dangerous to be shocked by 9,000 volts coming from a modern fence charger, when it's vastly more hazardous to stick your finger in a light socket where there is only 110 volts.

