

VETERINARY CALL

by Bob Larson, Kansas State University

Cultivating Good Relationships

I don't believe that any one person has all the knowledge and skills necessary to have a successful beef cattle business; but I do believe that many, if not all, of the necessary experts are likely to be located in most rural communities.

Beef cattle production requires expertise in animal and forage production, genetics, health, nutrition, finance, marketing, risk management and many other areas. When producers identify areas where their own expertise is lacking, finding local professional problem-solvers and advisors to fill knowledge gaps has several advantages.

Looking close to home for people to help solve your problems allows you to learn more about the strengths and limitations of your advisors — traits that are difficult to identify if your interactions are rare and brief. Close interactions allow you to develop confidence more quickly and deeply for those experts who gain your trust.

Interacting with local professionals provides an opportunity to strengthen the local business network, and will result in many community benefits. Ranchers who desire to thrive in a rapidly changing and complex business should identify and cultivate a good working relationship with local veterinarians, extension specialists, nutritionists, bankers, accountants, tax advisors, risk managers, livestock marketers,

brokers, genetic suppliers, range- and forage-management authorities, input suppliers, and other key professionals and businesses.

Using local experts does not mean that you should not also read or listen to what distant advisors have to share about topics important to your business. Discussing other specialists' opinions with your local experts is a great method to create herd- or business-specific solutions that are tailored to your operation.

Building a network

The concept of building a network of advisors also applies to the local experts you consult. I expect hometown experts to be interacting and learning from both regional and distant professionals in their own and related fields, and to interpret what they learn based on local constraints and opportunities. Building a network of professional problem-solvers who are continually reaching out to other experts to fill knowledge gaps is the best way for a rancher to have ready access to the skills necessary to run a successful cattle operation.

Most cattle operators find that it is necessary to focus time and resources

on the most urgent problems in order to control current losses. It is often difficult for individual ranchers to find the time and resources to address medium- and long-term problems and risks, even if the current short-time crisis is addressed (probably because another crisis issue has arisen). Because no one has all the skills and knowledge necessary to identify and respond to all current and future problems, spending time developing a local network of problem-solvers is probably the best strategy to deal with the challenges every rancher will face.

Even in a high-tech, global economy, the strength and value of a cattle producer's local relationships still have an enormous effect on the productivity and sustainability of their ranching operation. Finding and cultivating good relationships with a network of local problem-solvers is among the most important tasks for producers who are serious about building a ranching business that can be passed to future generations. **AJ**

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