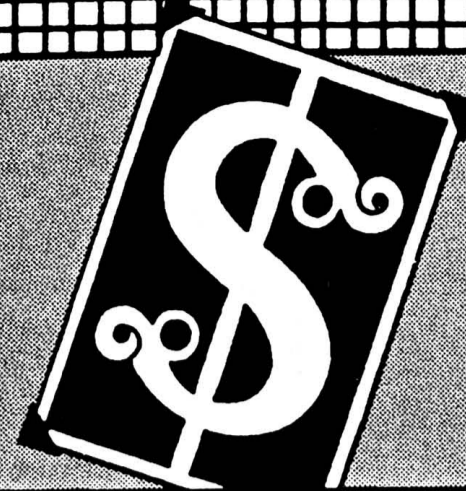


MERCHANDISING



Customers are your work...

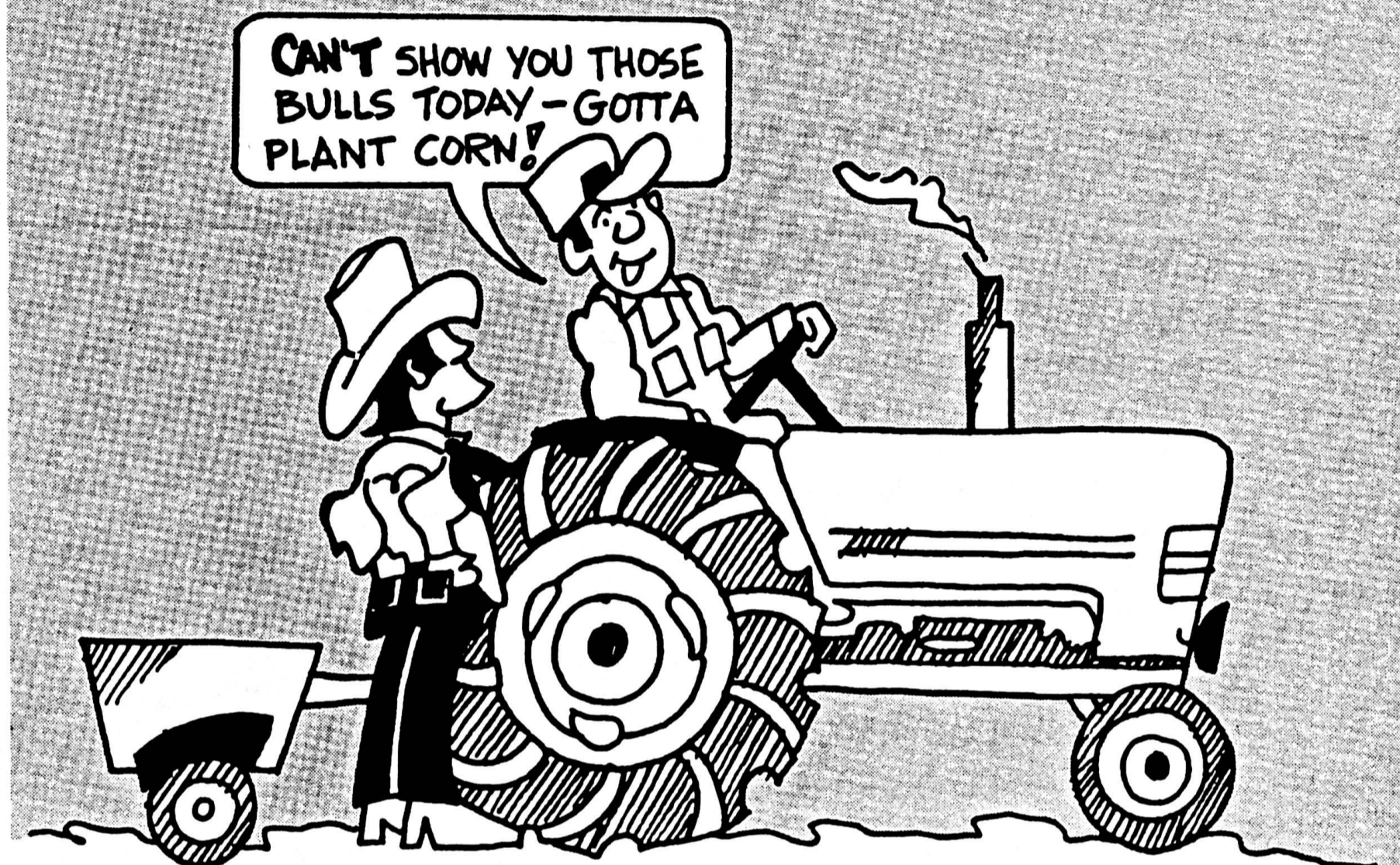
I remember it like yesterday. The year was 1959, and I was a fledgling writer for the *Chicago Daily Drovers Journal*, assigned to do a feature story on an Iowa Angus breeder for the paper's big Fair and Breed issue.

As I drove from Chicago, across Illinois and Iowa in late April, every farmer was planting corn working from sunup to after dark. I arrived at the breeder's farm at the prearranged time, knocked on the door, and his wife told me that he was planting corn. She suggested that he didn't like to stop and that it might be a good idea to come back at noon—maybe I could talk with him then.

I explained to her, that even if I was inclined to cool my heels for three hours until noon, that this wouldn't work. I had an appointment with another farmer a couple of hours away at 2:30 p.m. In those days the frugal influence of the late Fos Palmer dominated the Corn Belt farm dailies, and we didn't have the luxury of doing a story a day—at least not if we could help it.

To make a long story short, I finally got the lady to tell me where her husband was planting corn, and I went out and talked him down off the tractor for an hour or so—enough time to get my story and a photo of him with his 10-year-old over-fat herd bull in a weedy paddock near the barn. As I recall, it wasn't much of a story—which was okay because it wasn't much of an operation. There is no way, I figured, that this herd could survive given the owner's attitude to promotion, and it didn't.

What's more, I have a feeling that if I had been a bull customer I would have received much the same reception. This registered breeder looked at merchandising and promotion as



an interruption. He probably would have laughed at the slogans of the posters that today adorn the walls of the L.L. Bean mail-order and retail facility at Freeport, Me.

One I like reads, "A customer is not dependent upon us . . . We are dependent on him."

Another is a great summary of the craft of successful selling: "A customer is someone who brings us his wants. It is our job to handle them profitably—to him and to ourselves."

I don't know of a successful Angus operator—one that depends upon sales of registered cattle to pay the bills—that doesn't receive a potential customer like he or she is the queen of Great Britain. They'll stop almost anything they are doing to show their cattle, make their sales presentation, and entertain the prospects appropriately. And the same holds true for someone who comes to their place to do a story that will promote their operation to tens of thousands of their potential customers.

As Gerald Graham, a Knight-Ridder Newspapers business writer, wrote recently:

"A strong customer orientation is one of the key differences between successful and less successful organizations. As one vice president said in a meeting of his internal people, 'We must look upon customers as our work, not an interruption of our work.'"

I have the feeling that if the Iowa Angus breeder that I encountered years ago had believed this, he or his family would still be in the Angus business today. Instead, they have long since dispersed. Mute testimony to the fact that the customer does not depend upon us, we depend upon him.

Director of Communications
and Public Relations