

RISING ABOVE THE PLATEAU

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Are you a plateaued breeder?

Are you suffering from a bad case of burnout?

Allan Nation, editor of *The Stockman Grass Farmer*, recently revealed in a column that while most people think burnout comes from too long an exposure to high levels of stress, psychologists today confirm this is not the case. Stress occurs when we are facing a challenge that is beyond our sense of competence. It's often described as "being in over our heads."

Breeders often become plateaued or burned out. They have seen the depths of the valleys and climbed to a more comfortable level surface known as the "middle ground." While many are recognized as solid breeders, missed opportunities overshadow them like mountains. They often lose their aspirations and stay in their own comfort zone.

Plateauing is a phase in which a breeder's productivity falls below his ability to achieve. Many breeders have been through this stage at one time or another in their careers.

Although problems vary with each individual, the most common reasons for plateauing include:

- Sensing a fear of failure.
- Being overwhelmed with unexpected success.
- Having unfulfilled expectations.
- Having no clear short- or long-term goals.
- Becoming bored.
- Being ignored or taken for granted as a breeder or member of a breeder organization.
- Being seen as the "old time" breeder when new, younger, more energetic breeders enter the industry.
- Having lack of capital to do what should be done.
- Maintaining poor financial and cattle records.

Plateauing is a slow, gradual process. Symptoms can be hard to recognize. Indicators can include:

- Resistance to new ideas and change.
- Reduced contact with prospective buyers and customers.
- Spending more time away from the industry.
- Increased alcohol use.
- Displaying an exaggerated ego.
- Wanting industry organizations to become the problem solver.

To rise above the plateau a breeder should develop a list of personal objectives such as:

- Look for new and different challenges.
- Review sale records to determine a base and increase that base by 10 percent or a figure appropriate to your operation.
- Develop and maintain a customer profile notebook or binder and use it for better customer relations.
- Establish a priority list for potential prospects.
- Become a voice in local beef industry activities.
- Investigate new and innovative breeding practices and recordkeeping tools.
- Develop a bookkeeping system that projects actual costs of raising an animal, whether feed is home grown or purchased.
- Review breeding and marketing records with an Angus field representative or another respected breeder and respond to their ideas and suggestions.
- Enter into a mentoring relationship; the mentor often learns as much as the student.
- Network with positive, successful people.

It's often thought that raising good Angus cattle and marketing them successfully is the final goal. Many top breeders believe breeding Angus cattle is a continuing, never-ending process and that the fun truly lies in the pilgrimage.

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