

## Listen to Your Customers, Only They Vote with Dollars

A college professor called a while back to give me a piece of his mind.

The man was upset about an Angus radio ad on dehorning he had heard. The Angus Association shouldn't use such dramatic advertising he argues, because an animal rights activist might hear it, then use it against the cattle industry.

The purpose of the ads, I explained, was to get cattle producers to eliminate dehorning by using Angus bulls. One would think that might even please animal rightists. Besides, animal rights nuts would prefer something more in character to rant and rave about, like the recent sickening ad they produced comparing meat packers to the Milwaukee mass murderer.

Most every cattle producer would like to do away with dehorning, I went on to explain, and therefore the Angus polled trait is a big advantage to Angus breeders who sell bulls. Because of this it should be advertised and promoted.

As it turned out, this idea upset the professor more than the radio spot had. "Well!" the frustrated educator shot back, "that may be true but we should all be working together in the cattle business. All this competition between breeds is bull s...!"

Here is an agricultural professor at a major university who believes that competition between beef breeds is BS. He would evidently prefer that Angus breeders not tell potential customers about Angus advantages. And he is not alone. A panel of three researchers and educators speaking earlier this year at a meeting sponsored by a business that sells crossbred bulls, charged that, "breed politics hinders crossbreeding."

The tone of the discussion, as reported

in a major livestock newspaper, was that breed associations aren't operated in the best interest of the cattle industry. They seemed to dislike the fact that associations encourage the use of their own cattle



in commercial programs and thus would not take kindly to the composite breed theory that some are now advocating as the solution to our industry's problems.

There is really nothing new in all this. A lot of bright people, including a man named Karl Marx, have looked upon economic competition and marketing of products through advertising and promotion as wasteful and inefficient. Somehow they are able to ignore all the evidence to the contrary.

Competition drives producers to supply customer demands quickly and efficiently. When competitive forces are at work, product improvements and successful new products are created by demand

and competition. Real competition keeps quality high and prices low. Conversely, progress is hindered when big business, big labor or big government short circuit competition and ignore consumer demands. In fact, the cattle industry suffers from just such a situation today.

A recent Kansas State University survey shows that when a pen of finished cattle appears to have an extra 10 percent more animals that will grade USDA Choice, buyers up their bids by an average of eight cents a pound. These cattle, however, are worth some 47 cents a pound more to the packer. On the other side of the coin, the survey shows that packers usually bid more for low grading, low yielding cattle than they are worth.

Producers of superior cattle are not adequately rewarded for their product while producers of poor quality cattle get more than they deserve. Only when competition is allowed to work will there be major changes in the kind of cattle that go to market.

Where would the Angus industry be today if Angus breeders hadn't responded to competition and changes in demand that surfaced in the 1960s? Angus would be a minor breed today, that's where it would be. Some experts still bemoan the fact that Angus breeders changed the cattle to meet the competition. Thank goodness most breeders listened to the market rather than the experts.

To those who indulge in the practice of giving people a piece of their mind about the wrongs of breed competition I commend the following anonymous quote:

"Before you give somebody a piece of your mind, make sure you can get by with what you have left."