

JUNIOR STEER SHOWS:

This article is being written immediately following the Georgia Junior Steer Show.

Many folks say that it was a good one. It was well run and well judged from start to finish. The steers were well groomed and presented in good fashion by the greatest group of young'uns in existence. However, there were fewer good steers in the barn than any in the last five.

Many years ago (early '50s) we started on an "extremely small" selection craze. We went so far that our winning steers weighed slightly over 800 lb. even though they graded choice. People running feedlots said this was crazy. Commercial producers said they couldn't stay in business producing the likes of these.

We gradually started moving away from this kind. Cattlemen throughout the nation became performance-minded. We showed a lot of steers in the '70s that could have gone to many so-called "big-time" shows and looked okay. These steers were a little taller, slower maturing and faster gaining than the "baby dolls" of the '50s and early '60s.

More Was Better

Evidently, steer jocks decided if 2 inches in height helped, 6 inches would fix things up just right. If the industry wanted a 1,100-1,200-lb. steer, then let's take him to 1,400, sweat him back to 1,200 for weigh-in. They found bulls that would contribute skeletal extension and long bone growth, but they have very little capacity for feed consumption. In fact, they require a ration very high in concentrates to perform. Many of these steers must weigh at least 1,400 lb. before they get into the choice grade.

Why we let the traders set the pattern and talk youngsters into feeding steers like this is hard to understand. Nevertheless, all of us—educators, parents, breeders (both purebred and commercial)—stood idly by and let it happen. None of us have anyone to blame but ourselves. We were fast-talked and out-traded. Yes, many of us falling into one or more of these groups have judged shows and used steers of this kind. This has helped "snowball" this trend even more.

If we must have a "kind" of cattle to win a steer show with that can't be used anywhere else in the industry, then our standards for picking winning steers are wrong.

The real sad part concerning these "kinds" of steers is that they all have half-sisters that can't contribute to a commercial

cattle industry that exists to consume roughage and produce beef. If these half-sisters can't be kept as brood cows and produce profitably, then their brothers have no place in steer shows where we hope to educate by showing what the ideal should be like.

Natural Elimination

Nature will eventually eliminate these artificial critters as it did the "shorts" of years past, but in the meantime many 4-H and FFA members will be the victims of the steer jocks who are interested more in what they can get out of the program rather than what they can put into it. I hope the pendulum has hit the far end and will start back. It's long overdue.

Before you buy steers and commercial heifers for next year, ask yourself a few questions such as:

(1) Can a feedlot feed these kind and get along?

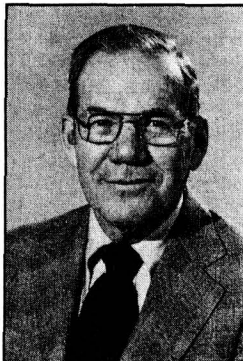
(2) Can a commercial producer raise these kind and survive?

(3) Will the total industry stay afloat if the whole beef cattle population was like this?

(4) Do producers of this kind have to depend on a group of youngsters spending hard-earned dollars to keep them in business?

After you satisfy yourself by answering these questions honestly, go buy a steer that you can feed like you were "sure 'nuff" in the cattle business.

Junior steer shows were not started to be a "poker game for parents." They were started and conducted through the years as a teaching tool to help develop youngsters and make better citizens of them. When we inject anything into the program that dilutes these efforts, we are wrong. Let's quit this foolishness and start over before we all go broke.



Dr. Daniel recently retired as head of the Extension Animal Science Dept. at the University of Georgia. During 20 years at that post, he helped mold one of the country's most successful state junior livestock programs and during the same time judged many of the nation's leading steer and breeding cattle shows.

HAVE WE LOST SIGHT OF THEIR ORIGINAL PURPOSE?

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by Dr. O.G. Daniel

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