



# For Granted

► by Eric Grant, API creative media manager

## Superstition

*Legend has it that at the climactic moment of the Battle of Waterloo, a gust of wind billowed up and toppled off Napoleon's hat. As it tumbled across the ground, a wave of fear pushed its way through the French troops. To them, a fallen hat foreshadowed defeat. By late that afternoon, the French flank collapsed — and Napoleon's 100-Day War was over.*

### Tumbling hats

Several years ago, I had the opportunity to spend a day with Chuck Schroeder, who had just been chosen to become the first chief executive officer (CEO) for the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA).

We met at his ranch in Nebraska, where he saddled up a horse, and we rode across his prairie pastures. We spent several hours taking photos and interviewing him for an article I was writing.

When we approached a gate — one of those pipe gates with the lever — he stayed mounted as he opened it, walked through it and then tried to shut it. He forgot, however, about the electric wire behind him, which he eased his horse against.

Surprised, the horse bolted. And, Chuck, already leaning off balance with his hand still on the lever, got dumped in a pile of cow poop. His Stetson hat rolled across the corral.

"Chuck," I said, "if I were a superstitious man, I'd say that doesn't portend well for the cattle industry."

Nevertheless, within a few years of Chuck's acceptance of the position, the beef industry took a change for the better. For the first time in nearly 30 years, consumer beef demand increased, and markets for cattle regained strength as we entered the early 2000s.

How much any of this had to do with Chuck — or with his hat — I'll leave up to the historians. But there is a lesson or two on the bull business: Tumbling hats have nothing to do with your success or failure. And if you're clinging to old-time superstitions when it comes to your business, you might be headed for trouble.

### Be flexible

Now don't get me wrong. It's not necessarily a bad thing to embrace tradition,

**If you're clinging to old-time superstitions when it comes to your business, you might be headed for trouble.**

especially when it comes to marketing and producing seedstock. But it's always a bad thing to not question tradition, and to not identify whether your business is being well-served by continued adherence to it.

My grandpa sold good numbers of bulls for many years to customers throughout western Colorado and beyond. He enjoyed some really good years, and some pretty slow years. His best years, I suspect, were in the early 1980s when the industry had embraced performance testing — and Grandpa's breeding program was built on performance, real-world genetics.

Looking back, I wonder how competitive he would be in today's marketplace. After all, the bull business has changed a lot since his heyday. Every time I turn around, there's a new expected progeny difference (EPD) for a specific trait, a new DNA marker, or new technologies for doing business.

I've come to realize that successful seedstock production is partly based on the ability to be flexible. The demands for more information about the cattle you're selling are unprecedented, and will continue to mount in the coming years. And, if you're bound by traditional production practices, it probably won't take long for your competitors to pass you by.

At the same time, it's essential that you keep a close eye on the values and

traditions that got you here in the first place — honesty, integrity and guts. Those are things in you and your program that genetic analysis or new technologies can't quantify. And, those things are things that will always be rewarded in the seedstock marketplace.

The key is balancing the two — and not allowing either one to turn your flank and rout your long-term plans for success.

**E-MAIL:** [egrant@angusjournal.com](mailto:egrant@angusjournal.com)

**Editor's Note:** "For Granted" is a monthly column written for the Angus Journal by Angus Production Inc.'s creative media manager Eric Grant. The column focuses on marketing beef, the beef industry and seedstock in particular — aspects of the business that are often taken for granted as day-to-day tasks take center stage.

