

## Adapt to the environment

*The 2008 Cattle Industry Annual Convention and NCBA Trade Show in Reno, Nev., was well-attended by cattlemen and allied industry representatives from throughout the U.S. While there has always been a variety of programs, subjects of discussion and points of controversy, one of the most interesting activities conducted during the entire week is the annual Cattle-Fax Outlook Seminar, which delves into the state of the arts and sciences that influence the beef industry.*

### Projections

The projections discussed included but were not limited to the following:

- ▶ Cow numbers are down in many states. U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimates as of Jan. 1 reported 32.6 million beef cows in the United States; some authorities think the number is even lower. The bulk of this

decrease appears to be in the Southeast where nearly 25% of our beef cattle are located.

- ▶ In 2008, beef demand is expected to be softer in light of a weaker economy, the mortgage and credit crisis, and higher energy and input costs.
- ▶ A weaker dollar will encourage more exports from both a live-cattle and beef-

product basis, whereas imports will be hindered.

- ▶ Beef exports are expected to post substantial increases, primarily due to activity in Japan and South Korea.
- ▶ Fed-cattle prices and feeder-cattle prices are expected to be in the same range as 2007 and show strength in late 2008.
- ▶ Emphasis on alternatives to fossil fuels will not diminish. Grain prices are expected to be strong early, with the strength diminishing later in the year.
- ▶ Energy prices will continue to rise, as will prices of fertilizer.
- ▶ Competition for land resources will continue to escalate.

### Adapting to current conditions

We in the purebred industry are dealing

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with the same situation our customers are. This means we must adapt to changing production and marketing conditions. Innovation and creativity must become the norm rather than the exception. Inputs and cow efficiency all of a sudden are top-of-mind points of consideration.

In this regard, your Association is two years into cooperative, multidisciplinary research projects at the University of Illinois and North Carolina State University relative but not limited to feed efficiency. Does this mean we will have the Angus breed characterized for feed efficiency next week? No, but it does mean we are off to a running start with funding from the Angus Foundation.

We are a storied industry; an industry infused with romance and nostalgia. An industry that, by the very nature of its environment, is subject to constant change.

Charles Darwin said it best: "In the struggle for survival, the fittest win out at the expense of their rivals because they succeed in adapting themselves best to their environment."

### **Ability to innovate**

A wonderfully positive attribute that exists in the beef industry is that we have the scientific knowledge and the technology to effect change in order to adapt and prevail within the changing environment.

We innovate, we explore, and we consider new and more efficient concepts. Perhaps we consider early weaning ... Perhaps we moderate cow size ... change our forage program ... or revamp our customer relations efforts. Perhaps we might re-evaluate our spending habits just as our forefathers did when they were faced with a changing landscape. There are multitudes of innovative thoughts lurking in the dark corners of our minds, just waiting to be cultivated.

There are several motivational books one can buy or rent that deal with change. We can read them to help us handle change and to inspire us to think creatively. One that readily comes to mind is a small, "easy reading" book titled "Who Moved My Cheese?" by Spencer Johnson.

The book is not only profound, it is fun to read.



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