



Angus Stakes

► by *Shauna Rose Hermel*, editor

Dare to think differently

I have to admit, when my brother got the barn cam for my folks to use to watch the cows at calving time, I thought he'd splurged on a luxury item. Now, a few years later, it has proven to be one of the best investments the farm has made. With the frigid weather we had this last winter during December-January calving, it saved wear and tear on people, and it saved calves by getting assistance to the barn at the right time. I'd even describe it as practical.

Fresh eyes

When we've done something the same way for so long, we convince ourselves we're doing it the best way, but sometimes it's just one less thing to think about. There's definitely some efficiency in "doing things from muscle memory" rather than exercising our brains to think of a better way, but we also can miss out on opportunities to make use of new technologies, new skills among the people working on the ranch and a different consumer environment.

A couple weeks ago, Todd and I attended the funeral of one of our church members. In talking to family and friends, we visited with one grandma who was so proud of her grandson. The children had gone off to school and pursued other careers, having no interest in the farm. However, this grandson wanted to come back to the farm and was in the process of taking it over. His was a fresh approach to farming.

He hadn't worked on the farm all his life, but he did study agriculture in college.

Listening to him explain some of his adventures and what he was learning along the way was a real treat. While he had more book smarts than experience, he was approaching the venture as a career and looking at what he could do to make a living at it. Without equipment or the capital to buy equipment, he decided to rent out the crop ground. What did he profess to be his biggest hurdle? Learning the regulations.

I believe two of the greatest gifts the new generation is going to bring to agriculture are their insatiable curiosity and their openness to doing things differently.

Combining the on-farm experience or desire for on-farm experience with entrepreneurial skills as they are doing at the University of Nebraska—Lincoln (see page 48), the King Ranch Institute and some of the other programs for young farmers and ranchers will help this young generation reconsider the practicality of doing things the traditional way and consider new management strategies.

Of course, I'm not suggesting throwing out everything we've learned in agriculture during the last 200 years just to be different. Common sense says there's a practicality to learning from previous trials and efforts and not wasting energy repeating mistakes. Daring to be different doesn't mean you should throw away traditional methods; it means you should be willing to take the time and effort to explore new opportunities and evaluate them on their merits in the current situation.

Sometimes that means reevaluating the cost of a remote camera for the barn or the watering hole (see page 38). Sometimes it means looking at a new marketing strategy for your calves (see page 42). Sometimes it means evaluating for yourself whether the premiums earned with a straightbred program override the acclaimed benefits of heterosis (see page 50).

We'd love to hear how you've dared to be different with your operation. Send us a short synopsis of what you've done differently on your farm or ranch and we'll try to share it with readers in an upcoming issue. You can send them to me at shermel@angusjournal.com or 3201 Frederick Ave., Saint Joseph, MO 64506.

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