



Editor's Mailbox

► Readers' viewpoints submitted to our staff



A little helper

I am enclosing a picture of our granddaughter, Emersyn Reese Meyer, age 2. Thank you,

Merlyn & Hilda Meyer
Meyer Angus

Penciled from a different scenario

I read with interest the article on preconditioning calves, "Pencil it Out," in your June 2013 issue. As a beef production medicine veterinarian, I always carefully examine the cost-effectiveness of a procedure that may add profit to a client's business. I was fortunate enough to have a client who allowed us to examine all expenses — including opportunity cost on the calves if they had been sold at weaning — and revenues for his 11 years in our state-sponsored preconditioning program.

Some highlights include a profit to labor and management all 11 years in the program, improved profit as calves were fed for a longer period of time before selling, improved profit with increasing postweaning gain and increased profitability as the owner gained more experience with preconditioning.

Angus statues at the Denver Art Museum

I recently visited the Denver Art Museum and photographed the huge bronze there. I had my sister-in-law, Cindy Smith, photograph me with the bronze to illustrate its size. My husband and I are relatively new to the Angus breed, using an Angus bull on our registered Texas Longhorn cows with great success. Thank you for the publication. It has been most informative.

Regards,

— (Dr. Fritz &) Rebecca Moeller
Socorro, N.M.

The actual average return to labor and management for the 11-year period was \$80.70 per calf per year, which is significantly higher than the \$10-\$24 per calf mentioned in the "Pencil it Out" article. Even in years of relatively high calf prices and high feed prices, our owner profited from preconditioning. Will preconditioning make money every year for every producer? Probably not, but 11 out of 11 for our cow-calf producer is a very strong record.

For the final three years of the study, the owner kept track of his time spent with all aspects of preconditioning and earned an hourly wage of approximately \$90 per hour. Our studies also showed that 63% of the total return to preconditioning was due to the weight gain of the calves. Many articles on preconditioning focus on the "preconditioning bonus," but the cow-calf producer has little influence on the price paid. Our study showed that this was not the most important factor in the profitability equation.

The "Pencil it Out" article correctly stated that the calves with the higher gain during preconditioning added more profit, but stated that 2.5 pounds (lb.) per day was considered a "higher-than-expected" gain. In our herd, the last seven years in the program we averaged 2.78 lb. per day and zero calves were determined to be "fleshy." Many articles that we researched either simulated or had very poor actual gains on calves, and we agree that this could be a recipe for poor return to labor and management in preconditioning.

For more information readers can download the extension publication *Managing Your Beef Herd: Highlighting Key Determinants of Success in Preconditioning* from the Purdue University Extension website (publication 446-W). More information is available in our 10-page

research summary, *Profitability of Preconditioning: Lessons Learned from an 11-Year Case Study of an Indiana Beef Herd*, that outlines our research in great detail.

— W. Mark Hilton, veterinarian
Clinical Professor, Beef Production Medicine
Purdue University College of
Veterinary Medicine

Point of view

This is a shoot-from-the-hip response to your article "Telling the Beef Story" in the February issue of the *Angus Beef Bulletin* (which can be found on pg. 82. A more in-depth feature story is in the March issue of the *Angus Journal*, pg. 278).

In reference to the quote, "Do, in fact, try to be transparent on the use of technologies because we are seeking trust." I was at first excited, yeah! Transparency is a good thing; it's required by any agricultural certifying agency in selling calves, etc.

Then in the next paragraph, tools to inspire confidence, competence and influence are suggested as ways to build trust — another good line of thought. The example of using influence bothered me, though, in which the article says that Smith cited the American Medical Association's agreement with Monsanto.

Wham-o, "The American Medical Association's agreement on not labeling GMO (genetically modified organism) foods." That pretty much shoots the whole competence and trust issue out of the water.

Monsanto does all it can to avoid transparency, and why? Hopefully, someday there will be some genuine transparency on Monsanto's part with genuine peer reviews of the practices and peer research on the effects of GM-based food products.

A question for you to think about, please: Would you feed your child from a paper plate that had been sprayed with Round-Up?

Sincerely,

— Jean Pocha
Wife of a cattle rancher and
wannabe non-GM food raiser.



Editor's Note: This is a tricky issue and there are many opinions on it. What do you think? Share your opinion on our Angus Journal Facebook page or email Associate Editor Kasey Brown at kbrown@angusjournal.com.

