

Livestock Production: *Wisdom vs. Technology*

God used his servant Daniel to alert the people of future events that would come to pass. This forecast by God perplexed Daniel and drove him to search for enlightenment. But for you, O Daniel shut up the words, and seal the book (prophecy) until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro and knowledge shall increase (Daniel 12:4). Note: the prophecy was that knowledge would increase with no mention of wisdom increasing.

We live in a time where knowledge has increased in such a form (technology) and at such a rate that has never before been achieved in recorded history. Proverbs warns that knowledge without wisdom is very dangerous. Wisdom is the principal thing; Therefore get wisdom. And in all your getting, get understanding. (Proverbs 4:7). Wisdom is better than rubies or gold.

Webster defines wisdom as a wise attitude or course of action, the teachings of the ancient wise men; good judgment. Intelligence is common sense; suggests an average degree of such ability without sophistication or special knowledge; common sense tells me its wrong. Knowledge is the fact or condition of knowing something with familiarity gained through experience or association, the fact or condition of being aware of something. Whatever dictionary definitions you choose to use, all three have a relationship, yet are distinct.

The state of the cattle industry in the USA, Canada, Europe and the entire southern hemisphere greatly disturbs me. Over the past forty years, the universities of America, Canada, and Europe have basically taken control of agriculture and livestock management with their “great” technological developments. These three countries with their accumulated technical knowledge, trained students and educators have influenced the world to the point, that even beyond their borders, the remainder of the world uses their bovine genetics and management styles.

These bovine genetics I refer to typically require grain and even synthetic hormones to reach their expected production the industry demands. Without the synthetic hormones, these animals may have the genetic propensity to gain 2-2.5 lbs. a day on grain. With the synthetic hormones they can gain as much as 4 to 6 lbs. a day. That kind of diet and rate of gain are very taxing on the ruminant digestive system. When the digestive system isn't able to function the way it was designed, other systems and most critical, the animal's immune system no longer function correctly. Therefore finishing cattle in this manner for human consumption comes with a price. These cattle herds are susceptible to stress, sickness and disease, which are financial burdens to the producer. The genetics that seem to work for grain finishing are actually quite fragile. The biggest price that we all pay is the unhealthy influence grain finishing has on the meat protein that humans take into their bodies. That's another consequence that “academia” won't be able to ignore forever. In the days of yesteryear, the cattle breeder

finished his own animals on the farm where they were born and raised. Why can't we afford to do the same today?

The average utilization of feed consumed in the dairy and beef herds of America is approximately 50%. In Argentina this utilization rate is 67%. A popular beef magazine recently reported that average carcass yields have acutely declined. The report stated that although carcasses are somewhat heavier than in years past, average cutout percent (take home meat) is only around 52-54%. For the grass producer a 60% yield is low in profitability.

There are two structural requirements that an animal must possess to perform well, regardless of the type of diet (grass, grain or a combination). Simply stated, these two physical requirements are a set of wide shoulders and a deep chest. Along with those skeletal attributes, for cattle to function efficiently they should naturally deposit .20-.25 inches of back fat by twelve months of age. I realize this may seem ludicrous to many who read this, but if we truly want cattle that do well, have a high feed utilization rate, and give us a worthwhile return on our investments, then we must have animals that exhibit these characteristics. I have found that this holds true for both beef and dairy.

The use of fossil fuels to produce starchy grains that are fed to livestock to compensate for their genetic inability to deposit back fat on a grass diet is monetarily forbidding. I'd also like to mention that weaning calves at early ages (not in drought times) is only good for the grain companies. The calf cannot ruminate adequately until he/she is around 10 months of age and then only to the level of care and nutrition received. The digestive system of a calf that has not reached full ruminating ability is easier manipulated to tolerate a grain diet. The cattle producer can more efficiently utilize the grass he/she grows with a higher yielding type animal. The type of animal that is higher yielding possesses the characteristics discussed above. The "system" will not pay a premium for this kind of animal. In fact, they will discount them because these cattle can only stay in the feedlots for 80 to 100 days before becoming overly fat. The "system" needs cattle that can continue to gain weight (not fat) for their desired 120 day period. They need a way to use their grain.

I would like to now give you an example of why you should strive for higher yielding genetics. Steer A is 1000 lbs. live weight with a 60% carcass yield (meat to bone) that produces 600 lbs. of take home meat. Steer B is also 1000 lbs. live weight but has a 70 percent carcass yield (meat to bone). With that additional 100 lbs. at \$5/lb., you have increased your income by \$500 with just one animal. And there is actually less cost of production because steer B possesses the proper physical characteristics for greater function and utilization of your grass. There is a small profit that can be made by the direct marketer at the 60% yield level. Increase that yield to 70% along with the animal's utilization ability and watch your profit margins grow.

Are you using wisdom to run your cattle operation? Why do livestock producers rely so heavily on the latest technology and university research without questioning its validity and practicality for their personal objectives? Do you and I live in a controlled environment where the littlest detail can be manipulated? Granted, field research studies are typically at the mercy of Mother Nature just as we are, but all other inputs and details of research study are carefully scrutinized and calculated. I won't say that nothing good or useful has come from academia. What concerns me is the probability that most, if not all, cattle research has been done using glandular inferior animals. What I mean by glandular inferior is the fragile genetics that require grain to reach any potential. More often than not, this type of animal is long legged, narrow shouldered and suffers from glandular dysfunction. Research using these genetics is not especially useful to the producer needing information and cattle that are sustainable on grass.

Come on folks; let's use our heads. Are we not fundamentally producers of grass? I know I don't grow any grain? On my farm, I only have animals that will utilize the grass that I grow. I have no need to bring in purchased grains to keep my cattle sustainable. Now to maintain this method of livestock/meat production, I must constantly monitor the phenotypic makeup of the animals I select to keep in my breeding program. I have gained knowledge from my own experience and also from wise cattlemen. I have learned how to make intelligent choices when it comes to improving the structure, which improves the function of the animals that graze my pastures. At the risk of sounding egotistical: I have livestock production wisdom.

When I lay my body down at night to rest, I stare out into the dark of the night, wondering and scheming in my mind about how my management practices and herd genetics must work for my benefit or things will never be any different or better. You can bet that there is no one else losing sleep from being concerned about your/my welfare. As grass producers, we have nothing to gain by using unsuitable (grain genetics) cattle. The powers that be do not have grass to sell and for many reasons won't in the foreseeable future. Research will continue to focus on the production of commodity grains and on the ways to use them. To them cattle and the feedlot is a natural fit. To me, there's not one thing natural about it.

It is well documented that domesticated herbivores have played a leading role for every developing and developed nation/country that has ever existed. There are three basic types of cattle; two of these have only been created in just the past 40 years because of the power of the cattle-commodity industry. There are the beef breeds that must have grain in order to become a finished product for human consumption, and there are the high producing dairy cows that without grain turn to skin and bones. The third type belongs to the dual-purpose animals that unmistakably made America great. On a diet of just grass, these bovines produce milk and meat that contain beneficial levels of CLAs, essential omega

fatty acids in the correct balance and many other vitamins, minerals and enzymes that are important for human health. These animals can sustain the family farm and the family.

The following comes out of the US Army EM 805 training manual (1944):
The keeping of beef and dairy animals is the greatest factor in the history of the development of man and country (USA) from a state of barbarism.
It is a well known fact the most prosperous nations, as well as the best developed physically and mentally, are those in which the dairy and beef cattle has long been the foundation of agriculture.
As far back as history records, man has been in possession of cattle and has made use of milk and milk products and red meat/beef.

When did we stop teaching the basic principles of human civilization in our schools, our military and university systems? I suppose they are no longer considered important for life and modern living. What will stop barbarism from making a subtle, damaging return to us?

Research recently released from McLean Hospital near Boston Massachusetts shows compelling evidence that a decline of Omega 3 fatty acids in the human diet can cause depression and mental illness. It saddens my heart to continually learn of more indications showing an unquestionable relationship between the foods we eat and the sickness and disease we endure.

Maybe we should take a closer look at Daniel's prophecy, running to and fro to see if we have become victims of our vast array of scientific knowledge. Have we become a nation willing to sacrifice our health and the ability to live long, productive lives for the pursuit of great knowledge? Have you ever heard the expression - I know enough to be dangerous? Knowledge without wisdom, without intelligence is very dangerous and very damaging.