

# Keepers & Culls



## Another crazy 'Corner' week



LEE  
HART

From the email bag... Among the fan and hate mail that comes into *Cattleman's Corner* there is often some back and forth between writers and readers about points that have been raised. Seldom does anything get vicious but everyone needs to make their point. Here are some notes back and forth from readers and columnist Christoph Weder about comments he made on a couple topics in his Spirited View column. And also see below an interesting comment from Alberta producer Cicely Knodel.

### WHAT WORKS FOR YOU...

First, Manitoba producer Ron B. comments on Weder's support for late spring/early summer calving: "Hi there, I usually read your write-up in *Grainews* although I often don't agree with it," writes Ron B. "You use the methods that work well for you due to location and your situation, but so do many others whose cattle raising techniques may vary from yours. Using different methods does not make them wrong and you right. This is why I read articles where the philosophy may differ from mine, maybe I can learn something. You might do well to be more open-minded on the topic of raising cattle. Good luck with your calving season, mine's done (that's what works for me). Ron B."

And Weder sent this reply: "Appreciate your comments Ron, I agree that there are many ways to do things, however doing them profitably is another question," says Weder. "Never mind the feed cost differences between winter and spring calving cows, there are also huge differences in terms of labour and overhead between these two situations. Although many don't like to account for time and labour in their operation we do, we also have to account for the feed and the diesel needed to manage a herd through the winter months. I am glad that winter calving is profitable for you, unfortunately the stats show for most it is not. Glad to see you had a great calving season. Christoph"

### THE RESEARCH SAYS...

And on another topic Bill Sanders, Technical Manager for Intervet, developers and marketers of the feed ingredient Zilmax took issue with a comment Weder had in his March 23 column on the product.

Weder wrote in this column: "Take for example Zilmax a recently new feed additive in the Canadian market place that is suppose to make fat cattle look like a cross between Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone during their glory days. "Recommendation was to feed for the last 20 days because that is when you will get the biggest bounce, 20 - 30 lbs." However there are no free rides, yes you will get extra carcass weight and better feed conversion but you will also create beef that comes closer to the tenderness of shoe leather as the product is

known for reducing marbling and decreasing the tenderness of beef."

Sanders wrote saying in part "... Christoph: I follow your articles and adventures. It seems that you may have misspoken about Zilmax... I'm sure that the truth is as important to you as it is to me." Sanders also provided a company news release on Silamax as well as a related article that appeared in the U.S. based *Feedstuff Magazine*.

In a response, while Weder says he drew part of his assessment from "an interview in the Western Producer with a so called industry expert" he went on to say "I don't doubt that there is evidence that backs your claims, especially when it comes out from the maker of the product. There is however also other scientific studies that have shown decrease in tenderness and palatability by trained sensory analysis. I quoted what was said in the Western Producer at a beef symposium that said technology is great but there are no free rides on anything. For what you can gain you always tend to lose in some other related way. Zilmax may increase carcass yield but it is proven to lower marbling and tenderness — those are fact. A lot depends on the cook, but fatty meat is usually more forgiving of a poor cook and if you ask consumers what they number one beef with beef is and that is tenderness. Why would we as industry want to use products that decrease it even more. The only reason you do that is because you would believe that you will win in the end by being lowest cost provider, which I know is a losing battle."

In the Intervet news release on a beef sensory study (a meat quality study with assessment of taste and tenderness) Intervet/Schering-Plough Animal Health says:

"The most recent consumer-sensory research reinforces consumer-sensory data Intervet/Schering-Plough Animal Health released in 2006, prior to the commercialization of Zilmax, which found consumers had a positive eating experience with beef from Zilmax-fed cattle. The new study involved more than 2,300 consumer evaluations of striploin steaks with various aging periods and quality grades of beef from both Zilmax-fed and non-Zilmax-fed cattle.

"Prior to the commercialization of Zilmax, significant consumer sensory data was collected to review product quality of beef from Zilmax-fed cattle. The research indicated consumers find little difference in beef tenderness and overall acceptability of beef from Zilmax-treated cattle and current beef products.

"More than 550 consumer evaluations demonstrated equal consumer acceptability for 14-day aged steaks from Zilmax- and control-fed cattle. These consumers rated both Zilmax- and control-fed beef for overall acceptability (94 per cent versus 92 per cent respectively) and tenderness acceptability (93 per cent versus 89 per cent respectively). There was no statistical difference in how consumers rated tenderness acceptability and overall acceptability of beef from Zilmax-fed cattle versus control cattle.

"Overall, the results from the two sensory studies on beef from Zilmax-fed cattle yielded similar results. When Zilmax is fed the recommended 20 days, it can aid the

industry in producing safe, quality beef more efficiently."

### CANADIAN BEEF

And on an unrelated topic, some time ago, Dean Layman of Woodrow, Sask. wrote: Christoph: I'm still enjoying all the write-ups you put in *Grainews*. When I get the *Grainews* I look for two people, Christoph Weder and Boyd Anderson. Your recent column "Seeing through the fog" made me think of a question I could never find an answer to.

Back when the great girls from Mortlach started picketing places in Moose Jaw that didn't sell Canadian beef my sister in Nanaimo started checking stores out there and found that she couldn't buy Canadian Beef, only off shore. Just after talking to her about this I was at a Natural Valley meeting (poor investment) and they said that two thirds of the beef sold in Canada is off shore. They also claimed that if we didn't import off shore beef we could consume all the beef we produce in Canada.

The answers I could never find were: Is two thirds of the beef sold in Canada off shore? And if so why don't we stop importing and help our own beef industry?

The Farm: Last spring was looking very dry so we tried getting some more pasture for our herd. We couldn't find any so in May my wife Leah, youngest son Shelby and I sold our cattle. My dad Leroy and oldest son Shaylor kept 60 young red and black Angus cows. If we didn't sell in May we would have had to sell all the cows in July because it was very dry and the pastures couldn't produce. With keeping a purebred herd we can expand very quickly when we buy more pasture, not before.

Dean Layman

Woodrow Sask.

P.S. Keep writing the good articles, they make people in the cattle industry think a little.

And Weder's reply:

Thanks Dean, I appreciate the letter. To answer your question, yes there is offshore beef that enters Canada. In the West most of the time it goes into food service or manufacturing and you do not see it in the retail a lot of times although I have seen it in Vancouver and on the Island. Ontario and Quebec is a different ball game. Again food service and manufacturing bring in considerable amounts and there is also a lot of US beef that comes into retail. That said, we also export to the U.S. Could Canada be self sufficient in beef production? Yes. Will we need as many cows? No. So it's our industry's choice. The reason this beef comes in is because of price. However, to raise prices here and to control imports we would have to mold our industry to look like the dairy industry, and somehow I do not think that will happen. The truth is if our industry contracts any more we will pay the price with the loss and momentum of what we had built for the last 20 years.

Christoph.

### SOMETHING STINKS IN EDMONTON...

And in Alberta, in a matter that doesn't involve Christoph Weder, producer Cicely Knodel of Seven Persons near Medicine Hat writes to



When responding to an emergency, Earl says he didn't think a horse could run too fast or stop too quick ...

### CONTACT US

## Write, E-mail or Fax

Contact *Cattleman's Corner* with comments, ideas or suggestions for and on stories by mail, e-mail, phone or fax.

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say, "Alberta cow/calf producers need to be aware of the Alberta government's failure to fulfill their obligation to them in exchange for complying with the age verification and premise identification program requirements. Perhaps if more producers voice their displeasure to their MLA's and the minister himself something may be done."

Here is her letter:

Dear Editor,

My husband and I recently received our second payment for the age verification and premise identification program known as AFRP II. We were shocked to discover that the payment amount indicated was less than one third of the initial payment. The accompanying letter indicated that the government had failed to anticipate the high level of participation by Alberta's beef producers and had therefore miscalculated the total amount of funds required to finance the program. Only a small portion of the original \$300 million remained so final payments were reduced accordingly. We were to console ourselves in the knowledge that had the government correctly calculated producer participation the original cheque would have been much smaller. Producers should apparently be grateful that any money was left for a second payment.

Producer support was quoted in the letter as being more than 95 per cent. Why would the government believe it to be anything less? The cattle industry in this province is under enormous strain. Any opportunity to improve cash flow however marginally is going to be seized by producers. In his letter to producers (July 7, 2008), Minister Groeneveld clearly states and I quote, "Recently eligible producers received a cheque which represented half of the \$300 million provided to help sustain the Alberta livestock and meat industry as it transitions under the new Alberta Livestock and Meat Strategy. In January 2009, the second half of the \$300 million will be made available." Any reasonable person would assume that if half was being paid in June and the other half of the monies were being dispersed in January that the amount initially received

would also be received in January.

Initial cheques were processed in June 2008. Minister Groeneveld's letter is dated in July. How could he not already know that he was over budget? Instead he let producers believe that in exchange for complete compliance with program conditions they would receive cheques equalling the amount of the initial payment in January. No one from the minister's office ever informed producers that the payment amounts were not going to be the same as previously received until the cheques arrived in March 2009. I can only surmise that the government did not share this information because it still wanted program compliance and that would have been potentially jeopardized if producers knew the government had no intention of fulfilling its promises.

Producers too need to estimate expenses and revenue when planning for the coming year. We do appreciate the difficulty in determining accurate estimates. However, we do not share the luxury of being able to say we made a mistake in our calculations so we cannot honour our commitments. I had no way of knowing that fuel and fertilizer costs would soar in 2008, but I'm still obligated to pay those bills. My creditors expect payment in full for services and products provided by them. Alberta's beef producers should also expect and receive payment in full for services (program compliance) provided to their government. The Alberta government, in my view, has broken a contractual obligation it initiated with producers and has violated our trust.

Premier Ed Stelmach's decision to honour his financial commitments (bonuses) to deputy ministers and senior managers is offensive in light of his willingness to so quickly dismiss his commitments to beef producers — the people who could genuinely use the assistance. Strange that money is always available for this kind of payment. I hope the premier, the minister and the government will reconsider its recent decision to lower the final payment amount. Next time around compliance may not be so willingly gained.

Cecily Knodel

Seven Persons, Alberta