



SPIRITED VIEW

Paid more for the same work?

Everyone wants to make more money, but many aren't prepared to change



CHRISTOPH
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This sums up many of the conversations a good friend of mine had while discussing protocols with other cattlemen seeking opportunities to move into our branded beef program. They all want to make more money, however few are willing to change what they have been doing because it will affect their cowboy ways. I have to laugh at this; somehow "cowboys" think that owning a herd of cows makes them immune from listening to market demands.

Truth is if you want to be in business, you have to listen to what the

market wants and at that same time what it doesn't want. In its simplicity it can be having a uniform set of yearlings ready for market that has been properly vaccinated, castrated and dehorned or it can be more involved and be as in depth as being subjected to audits for food safety procedure and environmental and land use practices. Marketing a product is not simply producing and selling it, marketing a product is creating a product that differentiates itself in the market place and allows it to be priced at levels greater than the norm for similar products.

During my recent marketing trip it was clearer than ever, that if we want to elevate the value of beef at the ranch gate it has to exceed the standards of every other global beef supplier. If we don't do this then the only way to get a buyer for our product is to be the cheapest. Being the cheapest is not where I

want to play, as there are quite a few countries that are better at this game than most of us.

Canada's global beef strategy has to be about quality, transparency of production, traceability and trust, however somehow every time I open a paper I read about another technology that is suppose to make us cheaper and more efficient.

I had a good pile of papers to work through when I came home and it didn't take me long to find some of this propaganda. 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



PHOTO BY CHRISTOPH WEDER

The changing face of beef marketing in Canada

extra carcass weight and better feed conversion but you will also create beef that comes closer to the tenderness of show leather as the product is known for reducing marbling and decreasing the tenderness of beef.

Everyone in this industry knows that stress is the number one trigger factor for creating sickness in calves. Of all the stressors, weaning and shipping freshly weaned calves is by far the worst and yet every fall the "cowboys" revel sending freshly weaned calves to town and wonder why there are less and less buyers wanting them. The fact that many Canadian cattle are traded three times before they are hanging from a rail makes me really wonder the efficiency of our system for producing quality beef products. Not only are there dollars winding up in other people's pockets for marketing and trucking, but it causes higher morbidity and mortality levels in the cattle and in the end effects the quality of the product produced.

Many of us are quick to point fingers at the order buyers, feedlots, packers or at the retailers, however keep in mind that when you point a finger there are always three pointing back at yourself. If you want to be paid more than you will also have to put more effort into it, and if you want to be a cowboy you might as well find a second job. ✍

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RISING OPPORTUNITY FOR BIOGAS

At least one lagoon digester has been implemented in Alberta, and this option is expected to increase in adoption among smaller operations.

"Lagoon digesters are a good option in many cases, but consistency of energy for on-farm use can be a big issue since these systems don't provide a controlled environment to optimize the biogas production," he says.

Another issue for small scale digesters aimed at on farm energy is matching up seasonal energy production and energy needs. "What you may end up with is lower biogas production in the winter when you want it most, and higher biogas production in the summer when you need it least."

Because most small scale digesters aimed at on-farm energy use are geared toward using biogas to produce heat, one option to better make use of biogas in the summer is to invest in a micro-turbine to allow for conversion of biogas energy into electricity. "This is a good option that has become more economical and effective," says Navaratnasamy. ✍

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