



SPIRITED VIEW

The tradition of holding onto tradition



CHRISTOPH WEDER

It's been a year-plus since I wrote about the Dragonflies, Butterflies, Bumblebees and Ants. If you recall, in that column, I described how these different personality types perceive their world; better yet, how they perceive change and how they react to it. More recently I read another book, *SWAY — the irresistible pull of irrational behaviour*. The book looks at many different high profile incidences of irrational behavior that make absolutely no sense, and analyzes the circumstances leading to their occurrence.

In essence the book attributes a big part of irrational behavior to what they describe as Initiators and Blockers in our society — people who either have a strong will to push things through, or those set in their ways that block things from happening. The authors conclude, having combinations of Initiators and Blockers for certain decisions is needed to make informed, well thought out decisions, because both parties raise points the other would not have looked at. This said, if combinations of working groups are not balanced it could also lead to stalemate and no movement at all. Worse yet it can lead to regression and going backwards.

From 25 to 35-years-of-age we are in the learning stage of life — accumulating knowledge, experience, getting direction and finding our calling. Then from 35 to 55 we are in the growth stage, where we take our knowledge and run with it — we are anxious to get ahead, grow the businesses, and are willing to take risk, try new things. Then from about 55 on we move to a stage in life where the goal is preservation of wealth. A stage where we step back from risk, make deeper analysis of our decisions and avoid things that would take extreme work to develop. People can at one point in their life be an Initiator and as they age, morph into a Blocker.

This analysis well represents many segments of our society, however when we add in the personality types of dragonflies, butterflies, bumblebees and ants it becomes even more complicated. For starters, within agriculture the percentage of population that holds onto tradition and is comfortable with the status quo (ants) is more skewed than in any other segment of our society. Add to this mix, the average age in this industry is approaching 55-years and it's no wonder there is limited change.

Half our farming community in Canada is now over 55 years of age and the percentage of farmers under 35 is less than nine per cent. Put these facts together with the skewed personality type and we have an industry entrenched in, "the tradition of holding onto tradition."

Everyone is well aware of net returns and the farm financial

crisis. The only sunny parts of agriculture nowadays are our supply-managed sectors. People and consultants outside our ag industry have said time and again, "it's time for a change, adapt, get with it, or die" — but the worse it gets, the more irrational people become and the more they cling to history and traditions like a two-year-old grabs onto a security blanket.

All of us in agriculture have influence and a responsibility for its future. There is no such thing as maintaining the status quo, because the world is constantly changing. What was right at one time may not be tomorrow. Take for example, grain farming's evolution from summer fallow/recreational tillage, to minimum

till and direct seeding technology that has taken place over the past 25 years. The benefits to soil and water conservation are immeasurable. Yet, I am sure the first producers who led the way were blocked and harassed left, right and centre by naysayers. The beef industry is no different. We had years of cheap grain, and a low-valued dollar that masked escalating production costs. Now we are faced with the consequences of change, but many people are hung up on the notion we should be able to turn back the clock to how it was. Guess what, it is not going to happen!

I get criticized from time to time about my environmental stance and our less than traditional ways

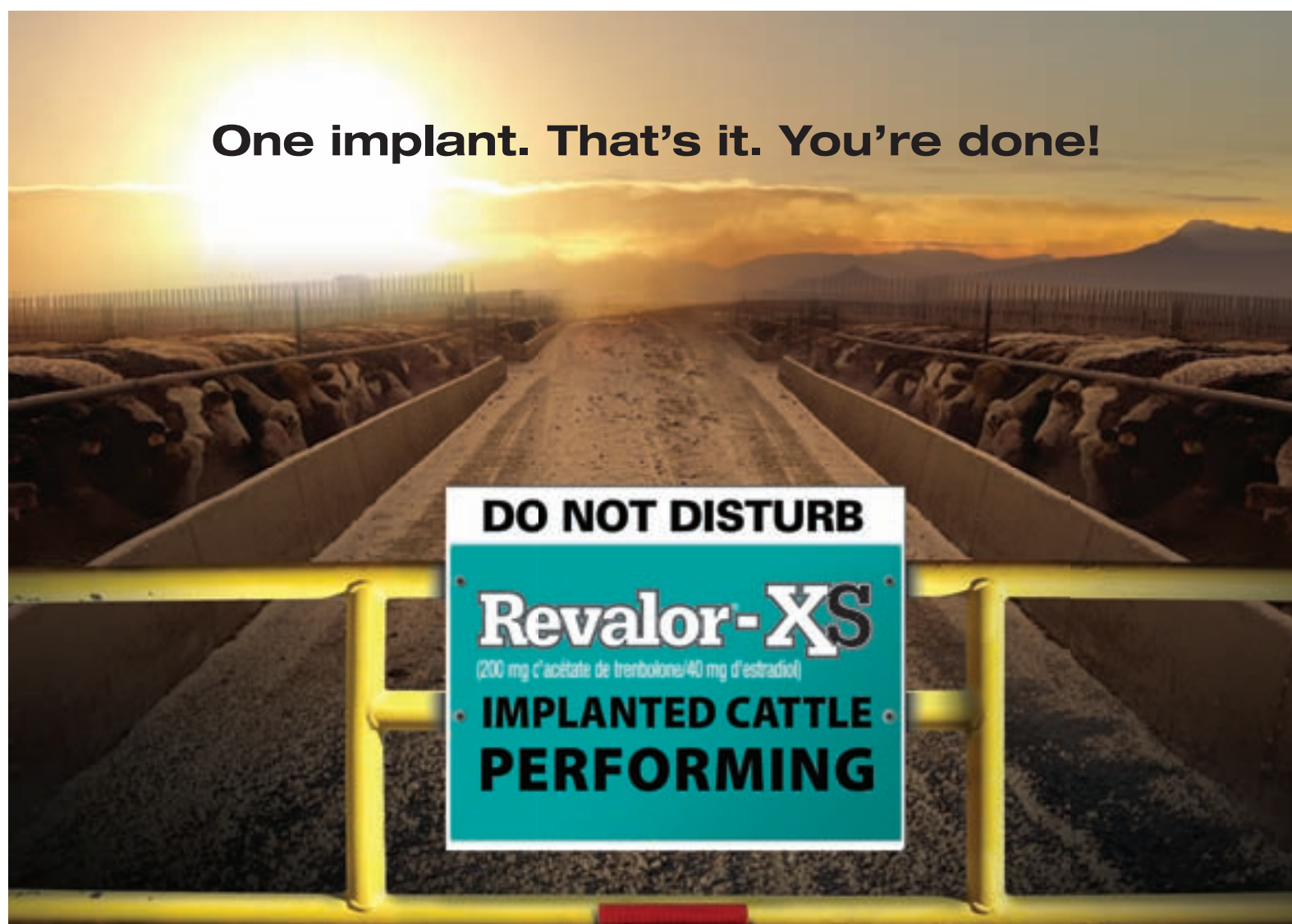
of running a beef business. The fact is, the old model of it being all about production does not work, and agriculture's impact on the environment is irrefutable. From nutrient loading of our watersheds, to excessive use of petrochemicals, to habitat fragmentation and deforestation — all these impacts are becoming more closely scrutinized by legislators, consumers and society as a whole. These are some of the driving forces behind why we do what we do, and why I say what I say. But, more importantly, we have to think about our next generations that are still walking in diapers or not even born yet. What about them?

I would like to think our impact on the next generation would be

the driving force to ensure the traditions we embraced are the traditions that become history. We were all given opportunities by our forefathers and should be grateful, but we can't dwell on the past. What many forget is that we can all impact the future by how we react, fail at or try to block change. Our future generations deserve every bit of what we were given. Traditions can be great, but they can also block opportunities for the next generation. Think about it... "What do you want the next generation to say about you, knowing you will be part of history?"

Dr. Christoph E. Weder is a purebred Angus breeder in the Peace region of Alberta and also runs SVR Ranch Consulting. For additional info check out www.spiritviewranch.com

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