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PEACE COUNTRY

CATTLE NEWSLETTER

Vol. 1

No. 1

Date: Fall, 1984

NEW BROOMS.....

They say new brooms always sweep clean! Most of you will be aware of the fact that I have taken over the desk in the Fairview Regional Agriculture office vacated by Keith Winchell. I come to this job with the distinct advantage of knowing a good many of you in the cattle business. Some are my former students from the Fairview College, others have shown cattle at one or more of the shows and fairs I have judged throughout the Peace since 1957. I look forward to meeting others.

I gather that this job of livestock specialist is to assist D.A.'s to do a better job of helping you with your cattle operations. There are times when you may feel you want to contact me directly or have your D.A. do it.

My emphasis this winter will be with cattlemen, and with this in mind am planning a Cattle Seminar at the Fairview College for February, 1985. The speakers will be cattlemen, dealing with cow-calf operations and feedlots. More on this later.

Down the road, I think that we'll see seminars held throughout the Peace, with speakers that normally never get north of Edmonton. I'd appreciate any comments you may have about your favorite topic or speaker.

HAY COMING OUT OUR EARS --

Over 100,000 tons of hay are now listed for sale in the Peace. I'm afraid that it will never be sold, and that very quickly now, decisions must be made to sell it through cattle.

Some cattlemen are already arranging to bring in calves or cows for feeding. It makes good sense. If you are thinking along these lines, then investigate using a commission firm to finance, ship and even market the cattle for you after the feeding period. Some auction markets are also acting as commission firms and are placing cattle. Before making a deal:

- ** check to be sure the outfit is a legally licensed and bonded livestock dealer (through your D.A.).
- ** find out the name of a previous customer, and get in touch with him to see if he is satisfied.
- ** compare financing charges. Some charge 1½% above prime, others above bank rates which could be as much as 3% above prime.
- ** find out all buying, financing and branding charges. Convert these to a price/lb on the kind of cattle you are considering buying.
- ** decide ahead of time, exactly the kind of cattle you want. For

example, if you haven't fed before, get yearlings rather than calves, and heifers before steers.

- ** budget your feed supplies, and decide how many you can feed.
- ** don't necessarily set a goal to finish the cattle - just to resell and make a profit.
- ** give your commission agent a firm top price/lb that you are willing to pay, and the exact number. Try to make a full load.

Contact your vet well in advance of delivery and arrange for him to give the cattle the once-over after delivery, and recommend a vaccination and treatment program. From the fourth to the fifteenth day will likely be your most critical period for health problems.

Decide on your feeding system, feed mixtures and supplements well in advance.

Don't hesitate to get in touch with me either directly, or through your D.A. Go for it!

CHEAP GAINS

Everyone, no matter how inexperienced, can make cattle gain weight, provided the cattle are young and healthy. Lots of good feed and water, dry protected corrals with room to move around, and a good sharp eye for detail will do wonders. However, elimination of parasites, and the use of a growth promotant will give that added boost that could provide the difference between profit or loss.

Warble and lice treatment should be all done before the end of November.

RANCH VALUES

Some south central B.C. cattlemen estimate they have about \$2,500 investment per cow unit.

COMPUTERS FOR CATTLEMEN

Most production facts in the cattle business can easily be calculated with an "Oklahoma Computer". In barnyard terms, that's a 25¢ writing tablet and a lead pencil.

RANCH SALES

You've probably noticed the ads in Cattlemen magazine about the Panorama sales in southern B.C. I attended the Douglas Lake Panorama sale, September 26, with Hugh Scott from Fairview, and Jim Wischoff from Whitelaw. Only steers sold, and about 3,500 went to buyers from B.C., Alberta, Ontario and Washington. The cattle were all sorted according to breed cross (Hereford, Red Angus, Black Angus) and weight. Some of the heavier pens of Hereford & Black Angus averaged over 900 lbs., and the sale average was about 800 lbs. The cattle had been brought in off grass and were offered with overnight shrink. We toured the nearby Quilchena Cattle Co., and got some great ideas on handling setups.

I have often thought that we could learn from the B.C. Livestock Co-op, who organize the panorama sales. The cattle are offered for sale on the ranch; and buyers are responsible for trucking. I'm sure we could adopt the idea to most of our large community pastures, and even some districts, -- all that is needed is a scale, approved by weights & measures people in Consumer & Corporate affairs. (Federal)

A CALF FROM EVERY COW?

The theme of the winter meetings that I have arranged with D.A.'s



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throughout the Peace are concerned with money from cows. A set of 3 meetings will be arranged over the winter in most D.A. districts. They are:

- "A calf from every cow" -
- "How many lbs of cattle for sale?"-
- "What kind of cow makes money?"-

These will be informal knockdown discussions. Come and join us. I look forward to seeing you.

For a long time now we have been talking about beef production factors in both the purebred and commercial industry, which really haven't got much to do with making money with cattle. If you were asked to name the five most important economic factors in your cattle operation, which would you choose? I don't mean the things connected with soil, forage or financing, but strictly with the cattle herd. I would choose these --

1. Open cows in the fall.
2. Calving interval, (the number of days between calvings) and the number of days between the first and last calves born in any calving group.
3. Disease
4. Growth
5. Marketing

I think that the average herd could, in a short time, overcome disease losses or concerns by working closely with a veterinarian, and improving overall feeding practices. Most vets would be pleasantly surprised by a request to get involved in development of herd health. Try it.

That leaves four areas for concern, and I intend to devote a lot of my efforts toward getting the message across that open cows, calving patterns, growth, and marketing methods are the areas of herd management that will give the greatest return for efforts spent in improvements.

For example, once a cattle producer gets concerned about the number of open cows, he has to examine an awful lot of his production to solve the problem. Herd bull fertility, breeds, cow frame size, forage quality & quantity, calving time, breed of sire & calving management and diseases all have an effect.

Farm cattle herds usually have fewer problems with open cows than do ranch herds, and I would include all community pasture cattle as ranch herds. The following table gives an idea of the tremendous interaction between cow frame size, nutrition and reproductive performance.

	Breed 1	Breed 1 x 2	Breed 2
	Small-Medium frame size medium-low milk production	Crossbred medium milk production	Large frame dairy breed high milk production
Ave calf wean wt (16)	604	658	763
Rebred conception (%)	96	89	59
Days; calving to re-bred	75	76	94
Total cost/cow (\$)	114	123	159
\$ return adjusted for conception	50	46	10

This information was gathered from a range herd in Oklahoma

HIGH ENERGY FOR YEARLING BULLS? - NO!

Glen Coulter has been trying to convince cattlemen for years now, that his research findings at Lethbridge have proven beyond doubt that fat bulls have low fertility. Back in 1979, he showed that feeding 80% grain, 20% hay to bulls from 6 months to 21 months of age severely reduced their sperm output and quality. Since that time, his research has been directed toward finding more exactly the age at which most damage occurs. So far he hasn't pinned it down exactly, but it seems that even at 12 months, heavy grain feeding had reduced semen volume and sperm viability by up to 40%.

LUNGWORM IN CATTLE

We used to call it "hoose", because it sounded like the noise calves made when they coughed because of

lungworm. However, up to this year, lungworm has almost never occurred in the Peace. This year we have some problems, because conditions were just right. The problem is most commonly seen during August and September. Usually the coughing occurs a week or so after changing pastures.

Dr. Jane Pritchard, pathologist at the Regional Veterinary Diagnostic lab in Fairview explained that "death of animals may not be a usual result in this region, but chronic and irreversible lung damage can easily occur. When you consider that one infected animal can be responsible for passing 33 million larvae, exposure under the right conditions can be overwhelming."

Extremely effective drugs are available to control lung worms. Your local vet can best help you decide whether or not there is a problem in your herd.

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PEACE COUNTRY

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CATTLE NEWSLETTER

Date: Winter, 1984

WINTER IN THE PEACE

I've spent a fair amount of time during the past four years sampling winter in Western and Central Canada. I recall the mucky chinook on a February day at Ft. MacLeod; a snowstorm beyond anything I've seen before at Swift Current, an ice-snow storm in south western Ontario and a sub-zero windstorm in March near Kamloops. Following each trip, it was a relief to return home to the stable, predictable winter we enjoy in the Peace.

This is good cattle country. We seldom get blizzards. Rarely do we have chinooks, but we often get mild spells that are very pleasant. We have a fair amount of brush left that breaks the wind and provides good shelter. But then, we don't have too much wind at any time during the winter. In short, it isn't often that we get conditions that will destroy the insulating value of good cattle hair.

Dry, thick hair is good insulation, especially if the air is still. Wind breaks down that insulation value, just as does rain, wet snow, or mud. Straw bedding or dry manure mounds will keep hair dry and preserve the insulating value.

Sometimes our still cold nights can be hard on cattle, because the radiation heat loss straight up from cattle standing or bedding outside can require a fair amount of increased feed to maintain the cows energy level. Any thick brush or shed roof will stop that nighttime loss.

Dark colored cattle attract heat from the sun, but white hair tends to

reflect it. Take a look some cold morning just after sunrise and notice how the herd will line up broadside to absorb the suns rays.

Back in 1970, Dr. John Webster did an environmental comparison between Grande Prairie and Lethbridge. He found that no differences existed in the cost of maintenance of cattle between the two areas. We've got the right climate in the Peace, all we have to do is pay attention to details so that cattle are neither underfed nor deficient in any specific nutrients.

"VITAMIN A BOB": VISITS THE PEACE

On November 20, Dr. Bob Hironaka, senior nutrition researcher at the Lethbridge Research Station, was able to spend 4 hours in Fairview discussing cattle nutrition. The visit was without much notice, and many who may have wanted to come couldn't. To make up for this, this other newsletters will be carrying excerpts from the tape recording of the meeting.

One thing Hironaka stressed was the need to pay attention to vitamin A levels for calves and steers entering the feedlot. At Lethbridge, the routine practice is to take a bottle of vitamin A, mix it with twice as much water, and spray it over the hay that calves or steers will eat. Hironaka's emphasis on vitamin A has earned him the nickname "Vitamin A Bob".

We'll have Dr. Hironaka back next fall, well in advance of weaning, to outline his experience with the nutrition of feedlot cattle.

WATCH THAT CHLORAMPHENICOL!

With the difficult weather conditions this fall, calves have been stressed quite a bit more than usual. Many producers have resorted to chloramphenicol as the drug of choice to treat pneumonia-like conditions, that won't respond to anything else.

The forage Institute is putting on a series of seminars:

Grande Prairie	February 11
Westlock	February 12
Vermilion	February 13
Olds	February 14

There is a human health hazard involved with chloramphenicol that shouldn't be overlooked. Apparently a deadly form of anemia can be induced in humans exposed to the drug. Some people may react while others may not. The statistical chances of you being susceptible is apparently about the same as being struck by lightning - one chance in 28,000.

THEME FOR GRANDE PRAIRIE IS, "DOES INTENSIVE PASTURE MANAGEMENT PAY??"

CANADIAN CATTLE MARKETING HANDBOOK

The Feds have upgraded this useful little booklet, and copies are available at this office. In addition to the directory of Federal Livestock Division offices, there is a list of market info, phone tapes, Canada's Beef Grade Standards, dressed carcass tables of costs, shrinkage conversion tables, break-even net selling prices, and market reporting terminology.

This is a handy pocket sized reference that would be useful to have at the auction market.

LESS GRAIN CAN PRODUCE ACCEPTABLE BEEF

That was a statement made in 1980 by Dr. Harold Hedrick, a food science and nutrition expert at the University of Missouri.

"We found that with silage particularly, you can produce very acceptable beef. It was possible to start weaned calves on silage and take them right through to slaughter, and receive top grades" explained Hendrick.

Keep in mind that this fellow is from Missouri, and he's talking about

TENDER LOVING CARE - AND PROPER MEDICATION

Nutrition and management can go a long way to overcome calf losses. Good feed, properly supplemented, good shelter and lots of straw bedding, with good water within easy reach. All these factors will reduce stress and keep disease outbreaks at a minimum.

If however, calves need medication, and you're set up with automatic waterers, then maybe you should look into obtaining automatic medicators. The unit is installed on the water line, and meters vitamin A, sulfa's etc. into the water. They cost between \$220 and \$300 - about the value of one small dead calf.

METRIC FIGURING

The feed lab recommends 100 PPB of selenium in daily rations for cattle. Figure it this way. PPB (parts per billion) is measured by milligrams (mg) in 1000 kg, or one tonne of feed PPM (parts per million) is measured by milligrams (mg) in one kg of feed.

the U.S.D.A. grading system where the "top grade" of U.S. choice is equal to our Canadian A₃ and A₄ grades, which are severely price discounted here.

Think of our potential for cattle finishing with silage.

WHAT MEDIUM FRAME COWS?

Following the last newsletter, I happened to drop by a purebred breeders place for coffee. The discussion quickly centered on the last Peace Country Cattle Newsletter, and the story about the small, medium and large frame cows.

"As a breeder, I have to believe that commercial cattlemen want growth from the calves sired by the bulls we sell. This means that our cows have to be bigger in order to raise those kind of calves. When you talk about medium or large, that can mean different weights in different herds".

He's right of course. The point is that a herd usually evolves to suit the feed and management system of the cattleman. Among each herd of cows, there are small and very large cows. Probably these should be culled. The medium frame cows left won't be the same size as medium frame cows in another herd. It's something like making the mistake of comparing weaning indexes between herds. A calf with a weaning index on one farm may weigh 620 lbs, but a calf with the same index on another farm may weigh only 450 lbs.

SULFUR AND SELENIUM

High sulfur levels in water particularly could make selenium

unavailable for digestion. If you have suspicions that your water is high in sulfur, get a sample tested. If the sulfur test shows levels higher than 600 ppm (ml/l) then consider raising selenium supplementation above what you now use.

MEAT IS MONTANA'S BIGGEST MULTIPLIER

Montana has 24,000 farms and ranches, and they contribute more to that states income than any other sector of the economy. Recently the "multiplier" effect of different aspects of the farm production was studied. The results follow.

For Every Additional \$1.00 Invested In	Total added value to Montana economy
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Dairy & Poultry	\$3.74
Meat Animals	\$5.34
Food Grain	\$2.72
Feed Grain	\$2.76

Similar studies have not been done for Alberta or the Peace, but it would likely show the same results.

MOLASSES LICKS

Molasses lick tanks provide an easy way to get some extra energy into your cows. However, when anything comes easy, it usually carries an extra price tag. Consider these factors.

* The protein in molasses licks is supplied by urea, which is only 50-75% as efficient as plant protein such as canola meal.

* Licks are an unbalanced source of calcium and phosphorous. Calcium is usually left out of the licks, because it tends to settle out.

* Molasses contains 40-50% water.

* the lick is treated to avoid freezing, and ends up being super cooled liquid during very cold weather. Consumption drops off because cows avoid extremely cold liquid, so energy consumption is reduced at exactly the time when higher levels are needed.

* In one U.S. study, molasses lick increased hay consumption by 18%.

SOME REASONS FOR CULLING

In the October 1984 "World of Beef" some comments were offered in a lighter vein by Dr. Baxter Black in

his column "On the Edge of Common Sense," about culling cows. Here are a few.

" I always keep the roan cows - they're good luck.

"She'll be as good as new, once the hair grows back".

" My sister had a caesarian, and we didn't ship her!"

" Since when did you have to have all your teeth to be a good mother?"

" She's not weak! Just gentle!"

" I know she's barren, but look how fat she is!"

"That's not lump jaws, just misaligned nostrils"

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