

Cattle Business in Mississippi – August 2015

“Stocker Cents” article

Leaving a legacy

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In the beef industry we often hear producers speak proudly of how their family has been in the beef business for generations, and that producing beef is “in their blood”. With the recent birth of our son, my husband and I have had many discussions of planning for our son’s future, and starting to build his cowherd. A recent quote I came across rings especially true during these talks, “It is up to us to live up to the legacy that was left for us, and to leave a legacy that is worthy of our children and of future generations”- Christine Gregoire. In the beef business, it’s important to consider the impact that the management and breeding decisions that you make today will have an impact on future generations, and what type of legacy you’ll leave behind.

During one of these discussions of what we our son’s future, the topic of how many generations has he been in the cattle business came up. Often we hear ranches in the western states, proclaiming proudly that “our ranch has been in the family for 7 generations”, but we don’t often hear this in the southeast. After doing a little digging into my family history, I was surprised to discover that my son is a 5th generation cattle producer. He’s already off to a great start building a cowherd. His first cow was registered in his name in April of this year, and hopefully she’ll keep producing for him for many years in the future.

The beef business is such a family business. Many of you reading this story I’m sure have fond memories of days spent in the pasture or in the barn with your parents, siblings, and grandparents. This part of our story is very important for us to share. Often beef gets a bad name with consumers, who have been led to believe that beef is produced on factory farms by faceless corporations. It’s important to share with your friends, neighbors, classmates, or even the mom you meet in the grocery store your beef story. Tell them how the beef industry is truly a family affair, with multiple generations involved in the family farm.

Young cattlemen have much to learn from previous generations. There are many experiences that should be passed down from one generation to the next. This is often knowledge that can’t be found in textbooks, and was hard earned through sweat, tears, and experience. Research is continually improving our knowledge of beef production, but there are some practices that are popular simply because they work year after year. It’s important not to discount tried and true practices, and it is also important to not be afraid to implement a new technology or practice that could ultimately improve your bottom line.

Rising land and input costs coupled with the ever increasing age of the average beef producer makes the focus on the younger generation of beef producers even more important. Although many young people want to be involved in the family farm, they often feel forced out either due to job or family responsibilities or simply the fact that the cattle may not be enough to support more than one family. It is becoming increasingly more difficult for a young producer to simply start from scratch without inheriting any land or family support, but it can be done. There are numerous resources available to help young cattlemen get started in the business.

For young cattlemen it is very important to get involved, with your family, your community, other young cattlemen, and producers across the state and even the country. Mississippi Cattlemen’s Association provides a great place to get involved. It is important for young

producers to seek advice and ask for guidance. Seek advice for what has worked for your family, your neighbor, or your extension agent or specialists. While there is no cookie cutter formula for success in the beef business, information gathering is crucial.

The beef industry is proud of its history, and its producers love to share their stories when asked. I encourage you to share your story and your legacy frequently. Take into consideration how a breeding, management, or marketing decision will have an impact on your future legacy or your grandchildren's future legacy. I'm proud to be a 4th generation beef producer building a legacy for the 5th generation. Are you?

For more information about beef cattle production, contact an office of the Mississippi State University Extension Service.