



Wall of fame or shame?

By Miranda Reiman

“Unforgettable,” croons Nat King Cole, “...that’s what you are. Unforgettable, though near or far.”

The charming voice and smooth lyrics of the classic song sure make being “unforgettable” sound like an awfully good thing.

Even when applied to cattle, it certainly can be. There are those “bell ringer” groups that gain and grade. They never get sick and they earn premiums upon harvest.

If a cattle feeder remembers your pen, these are things you hope are running through their head. You want them to smile when thinking about the ease with which the cattle went on feed and how they really never had a bad day.

But there are times when unforgettable is not such a positive thing.

Last fall, my colleague Paul Dykstra was part of a session entitled, “How to Build the Perfect Feedlot Steer,” and during it mentioned that the feedlot pen rider knows what the industry does not need.

“You do not want him to become familiar with your cattle.”

You see if there is an imaginary “Wall of Fame,” full of cattle that buyers hope to purchase again, there is an equal and opposite “Wall of Shame.” An owner’s name just might cause them to shudder at the likely “wreck.”

They might remember numerous pulls and repeated treatments or cattle that faced many challenges as they came on feed. Or maybe it’s the attitude that sticks out the most—the mean and hot-headed critters they cared for each day.

Just as you never want to be on the “do not accept checks from” list behind the counter at your local convenience store, you certainly don’t want to be on this list.

It might not be a published register, but it’s just as important to your bottom line. The cattle business is a small one after all, and word travels. Your reputation (or your cattle’s) may precede you in the auction barn or as you try to make a direct sale with a neighboring feedyard.

That's why small things all add up. Vaccine handling and administration, the details involved with calving health and weaning, yearlong herd nutrition—they all make a difference. That can help animals express genetic potential, though proper management doesn't help mask poor choices.

It might take extra work to get feedback from buyers, but if you can open a communication loop, it will be worth the effort.

Because when you hear that your cattle were (channel your inner Nat King Cole here) “unforgettable...in every way,” you want to be sure that's a positive description.

Next time in *Black Ink*[®] Steve Suther will look at branding time. Questions? E-mail mreiman@certifiedangusbeef.com.

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