

BLACK INK

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Pigs, people and profit

By Nicole Lane Erceg

We lived in a two-bedroom apartment in the middle of the city when my husband made the first livestock purchase of our marriage.

Bidding in an online pig sale, he made us the owners of a beautiful crossbred gilt with nowhere to live. No barn, no plan, no pig feed, no truck or trailer, absolutely nothing we needed to start a livestock business. We couldn't even fill out the shipping information for where this gilt would go.

The planner in me panicked. What in the world had he/we just done?! And what were we going to do now?!

He calmly turned to me and said, "The world is run on partnerships."

Though not necessarily comforting at the time, he wasn't wrong. There was no way we could start a livestock business alone. Whether you're raising pigs or cattle, it takes a good team to get the job done.

Producing premium beef requires an excellent genetic supplier, a superior health program, a great feeder, a careful rancher making sure those calves never have a bad day and of course patient mentors who pass along their wisdom. When all of these key people come together, incredible things can happen.

I spoke with a rancher recently who was being recognized for his success in the cattle business. His most recent load of cattle graded 100% Choice or better, including 32.5% Prime. Humbly, he attributed that achievement to generations who built the business before him, his veterinarian, bull supplier, feedyard partner and many improvements in technology that gave him added tools. He gave all credit to the people around him.

Of course, he did more than his fair share of the work, but said the most valuable asset in raising those high-quality cattle was the investment he'd made in relationships with people. Although genetics, management and hard work are vital, the right people on your team help drive the decisions that result in profitable, high-quality beef.

The cattle business has a lot of complex, moving parts—you can't be an expert in all facets of animal health, grid marketing or cattle nutrition. When you want to start or grow a business, or just get into situations where you don't know what to do next, it's nice to have more than a few numbers to call.

That evening we spontaneously started our pig business, we may have put the cart before the horse. But having the right people around helped turn a snap decision into a profitable, growing enterprise. With a few quick phone calls, we had more than a home for the gilt, we had business partners.

It doesn't matter what part of the livestock sector you're in, the people you rely on can mean all the difference in your success, profitability and the fun you have along the way.

Because at the end of the day, this isn't just the livestock business, it's a people business.

Next time in *Black Ink*[®] Miranda Reiman will make some real points about fake news.

Questions? E-mail nerceg@certifiedangusbeef.com.

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