



Never stop learning

Experience is the best teacher. But you can learn much faster through others' experiences, and it sure beats reinventing every wheel through trial and error. The book doesn't close on any lesson until you have the chance to apply it. In fact, our system of education is based on the concept of learning and application.

Whether you hold a doctorate or dropped out of formal education early to attend the school of hard knocks, you never stop learning. Beef producers are blessed with regular access to a full program of continuing education, at little or no cost. Just doing the daily chores sometimes results in an unexpected education when the unforeseen happens.

Some folks learn better on their own than they do in group settings. College professors admit they continue to learn from self-taught experts in grazing, animal breeding, cow psychology and marketing, for example. These individuals may have little or no higher education, but they have figured out much by observation.

Most of us are not natural how-to wizards, however. If we shut out everything but the daily cattle work, trial and error is going to be the most expensive education we can get. Reading farm and ranch publications is one good way to bring in outside ideas that may be worth trying.

Another great way to learn is from your neighbor. You can watch the trials and apparent errors from across the fence, then stop by one day to get the full story. Many hundreds of producers, in small groups across the country, are banding together out of common curiosity and

fellowship to learn from each other. They also consult with outside experts like feedlot managers, seedstock producers and bankers.

The University Extension Service covers the country with the greatest educational resource in the world. For nearly every challenge you face, someone in Extension has a helpful suggestion based on work with other producers like you. The network reaches from county to state level with a lot of interstate cooperation, too.

Extension beef specialists host seminars such as the Four-State Range Beef Cow Symposium, with collected wisdom from a year or more condensed into a few days. Nationally, they cooperate with science-minded producers and industry in the Beef Improvement Federation. The group aims to debut and transfer promising technology from research to the ranch.

Several Land Grant universities have also set up outreach programs in continuing education that are styled after college classes, with names like Beef 101 (basics) to Beef 808 (advanced). These short courses are a great way to gain understanding of the entire scope and supply chain in the industry.

If you are looking at some more specific gaps in knowledge, follow up with an Extension specialist, or look around. A desire to focus on policy and leadership could point to your local, state and even national livestock producer organizations. Through these, you will again find educational programs, often sponsored or even produced entirely by industry partners.

Private enterprise schools and short courses can round out any other educational needs. Videos and CD's are available on everything from calving to record-keeping, and of course, there's the World Wide Web.

Next time in *Black Ink*, we'll take a closer look at long term planning. Questions? Call toll-free at 877-241-0717.

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