



Learn from example

By Miranda Reiman

Your dad would climb up on the tractor, pull out the choke, push in the clutch and start it up. “Putt, putt, putt,” and he was off to plant or rake hay or bale.

As a youngster you might have watched this routine over and over again, so it didn’t take too much formal training when you were old enough to take the helm. The first time you started the tractor by yourself and set off to mow, you felt freedom, accomplishment. That’s just one way you’ve learned by example over the years.

There were the siblings, cousins or friends who taught you how to build forts, play ball or maybe even how to find a little mischief now and again.

It seems the older we get, the less likely we are to apply this principle of watching somebody else to gain knowledge. Maybe our independent American nature deters us, or we just get so involved with what’s going on in our own shop that it’s hard to look down the road for wisdom.

Now is the time to tap into that unused resource of fresh ideas. Perhaps you’ll find some profitable approaches to put into practice on your farm or ranch.

The fall brings readily available opportunities to observe. Across the country there are hundreds of field days, cattlemen’s tours and demonstration plots that can teach you a thing or two, if you look.

Trying a new technology can be a big step and take a significant investment in time, money or both. Seeing what the producer in the next county does might give you an idea of how to apply it on your operation. Cattlemen might even have suggestions on what they’d do differently if they had it to do over.

Why not learn from someone else’s mistakes before experimenting yourself? You were probably glad when your brother tried riding his bike off the silage pile instead of you. Turns out the landing wasn’t so cushy after all.

There are plenty of local opportunities to engage this learn-from-example method, but even national tours hold appeal. Some might attend these events as a way to see the country and meet new friends — but to get more bang out of your travel budget, include education in the list of goals.

Challenges can be region specific, but their solutions can often be applied in unique ways for diverse locations. A rancher in North Dakota might plant a few more windbreaks to deal with wintertime wind chills, but the same ideas of cattle comfort apply. A Texas producer could see those “windbreaks” as shade to ease the blazing summer sun.

A northern rancher may worry that it is too hot to wean on Labor Day, until he sees it done successfully 500 miles south where the weather is hotter.

In the same vein, perhaps a local came up with an ingenious fencing method that quickly spread across a several-county area. To everyone in that vicinity it’s second nature. It’s just the way they build fence now. To you—an outsider looking in—it could be just what’s needed to beef up your five-wire.

If a few producers in the next county are planning a 1,000-mile trip to look at potential custom feeding partners, volunteer to help pay costs if you can go along. You need to understand that next segment of the industry and how you can add value to your calves in their eyes.

Everyone knows how difficult it is to balance all your production goals while keeping your business in the black, but some make it look easy. Step back and say, “How are they able to keep cowherd function, while pushing the envelope on efficiency and carcass merit?” Tour their operation and find out what could work for you.

Once you identify their secret to success, it won’t be long and you can return the favor as a voice of experience for cattlemen looking to learn from each other.

Next time in *Black Ink*, Steve Suther will look at the gap between producer and consumer. Questions? Call toll-free at 877-241-0717 or e-mail mreiman@certifiedangusbeef.com.

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