



Who's got your back?

By Miranda Reiman

The president of the United States consults his Cabinet. The corporate CEO has his board of directors, the superintendent, his school board. A professional football team has coaches, trainers, publicists, facilities managers and more.

Starting to feel a little lonely back at the ranch? Maybe it's just you as the player-coach. You decide what gets done when. You know when it's time to wean calves or put up hay. You develop your own game plan and follow it. You also play the role of trainer and publicist, and you're reminded of your facilities manager title every time you fix fence or re-tin a shed.

With all of those responsibilities, you might welcome the idea of having a cabinet or board to call on when you need them. Who is in your corner? Where do you go for advice on your farm or ranch?

There are some obvious choices: your feed dealer, your banker, your bull supplier, your veterinarian. Some people find their way onto your "dream team" because they are already providing some service that you pay for. These carefully chosen professionals probably know your operation as well as anyone. It's important to share with them your ambitions and plans. They are the people who can help make things happen.

If your vet knows you're going to retain ownership after weaning, he may be more interested in coordinating your health program with that of the feedyard. Your bull supplier may help you interpret carcass data and plan your next move. Your feed dealer might help you look into the advantages of creep feeding.

Others you may add to this advising list provide more of an outsider's look into ways to improve your cattle enterprise. Extension agents and other university personnel want to see everyone succeed. They can share experiences that they've had or management they've seen work in research or on other farms and ranches.

Land Grant universities put on workshops aimed at specific pieces of your farm or ranch such as business management, calf health, grazing strategies and animal handling. Extension educators can also help you tackle challenges unique to your situation.

Your cabinet now numbers somewhere between five and a dozen. The president gets 16 at his disposal—some boards are even larger.

Your team could include your neighbors and peers. Those coffee shop chats can be chalked off as advising sessions if you get on the right subjects. You don't have to tell Bill, John and Dave that you're thinking about early weaning calves, but you could steer the conversation toward weaning in general.

Maybe you'll learn what not to do or whose example you don't want to follow. Then again, a quiet neighbor might just have the best advice of all. You never know until you ask and listen.

Farm publications often feature producers who are bucking trends. Their success stories won't work for everybody, but could spark some ideas to check in to.

You'll need to weed through this growing directory and find those you trust and the opinions that seem a bit shaky. Be open to new ideas, but be wary of the "perfect" solution to anything. Mentors can point you in diverse directions and provide different perspectives, but you still have to make it work on your operation.

From professional business relationships to the casual roadside conference, you have sources of information, counselors and friends at your disposal. Whether you call them your cabinet, dream team, advisory board or associates, these people are there to help. You're not in it all alone after all.

Now that you've identified the group, call on them from time to time. But remember the many comparisons between advice and medicine. It can't work if you don't take it, but avoid the overdose.

Next time in *Black Ink*, Steve Suther will look at what the market wants. Questions? Call toll-free at 877-241-0717 or e-mail steve@certifiedangusbeef.com.

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