



No boundaries

By Miranda Reiman

In a snow globe, the white flakes drift peacefully on a quiet farmyard. When cattlemen trudge through four-foot snow drifts in 30-mile-per-hour winds and single-digit temperatures to check on a sick calf, it isn't exactly the same picture of serenity. At that moment, Northern producers must think they must live in the toughest place in the world for raising cattle.

Others endure the exact opposite, maybe a few months later. The parched soil crunches beneath their boots on another day with temps over 100. There hasn't been a "second cutting" of hay in years and the cattle have to keep traveling further and further to get a complete meal.

At national gatherings it's easy to hear comments like, "Yeah, but we've got that fescue to deal with," or, "Of course at our altitude that just won't work."

There are plenty of challenging situations across the country that call for an individual approach. The ability to adapt is one of the great strengths of the beef industry, both man and beast. Cattle thrive where other species and agricultural enterprises cannot.

What works for a Montana rancher or New York farmer might not be even a remote possibility for a producer in Mississippi. But one realm of production that need not be abandoned based on your physical coordinates is a focus on quality. That's right, quality knows no boundaries.

Some lift an eyebrow. Those high-marbling cattle can't fit _____ (insert your environment here). They'll never survive.

The truth is they can, and thrive. It might not be easy at first, but the key is finding and further adapting the genetics to your situation, whether that's cold winters, fescue problems, broiler-oven summers, or all of the above.

The diversity of genetics available from successful producers near your farm or ranch lets you look for those that will fit consumer demand while keeping all of your other production criteria front and center. It might take some extra attention to find and fine-tune them, but they're out there.

Producers from all across this land prove it every day.

One western Kansan raises cattle on the short-grass High Plains while adding nothing but salt and mineral. Three years of data on more than 500 head shows an ability to grade 80% premium Choice and Prime. And he wants to get better.

A family in western South Dakota hits those same marks with their 600-head herd. The cows can be found calving in the midst of a blizzard with scant protection on the open plains, and when winter comes early they might wean in arctic weather, too.

Down near the Mexican border, you can ride out with a rancher who faces more than 30 days every summer with temps above 100 degrees. Scorching heat doesn't deter his focus on adaptation. Cattle from that ranch average 90% to 100% Choice, with nearly half reaching premium Choice.

These aren't tales from a fantasy land. They're true stories that show what's profitably possible. Maybe they are inspirations or examples of adaptation goals to shoot for, but anomalies they're not.

Don't believe it? Just give it a try for yourself.

Next time in *Black Ink*, Steve Suther will consider strength in numbers. Meanwhile, if you have questions for us, call toll-free at 877-241-0717 or e-mail mreiman@certifiedangusbeef.com.

END