



This, I gotta see

We live in an era of new ideas and technology that can produce better beef profitably. It's exciting to try out the cutting edge, but unless you are isolated and independently wealthy, you'll feel pressure to justify your actions. When you "know" you are right, that pressure is a pain in the neck. Maybe you just need an adjustment.

There is risk in making changes to an enterprise based on any new insight, tool or practice. The more you depend on that enterprise for a living, the more risk. The less known about the new application, the more risk. On the other hand, when new ideas debunk myths that stand in the way of profit, financial rewards can be great.

In many farm and ranch businesses, there is a generational divide. Those who devoted their life to the business may feel a conservative skepticism toward ideas put forth by younger, inexperienced partners. They may also depend on the farm's continued financial strength for their retirement security.

A senior partner may be less conservative, but still skeptical. Conflicts arise from different ways of trying to achieve the same goals. If decades of experience and intuition without data served your father well, he may question the value of hours you spend on a computer or methodically sorting cows based on data.

Your banker can raise a lot of questions, too. But if he is a scientific skeptic, you can convince him with proof. He's not against progress, if that's what it is. He just takes a Missouri, "show-me" approach.

Any reach toward progress, must recognize its foundation. Maybe the previous manager set up a performance-oriented program and established benchmarks that are hard to beat. Yet, if those records are mainly production-based, there's work to be done on the bottom line.

Maximums often give way to optimum under the light of financial analysis.

Differing views come from every age group and orientation along the optimistic-pessimistic line, men or women. A spouse or a junior partner may be holding up your idea of what might be progress, waiting for more information. As long as the skeptics recognize proof when they see it—and you know when to admit they are right—they do the business a great service. They make you think.

Say you want to crossbreed the cows to bulls your friend is selling. You will get hybrid vigor so the calves will weigh more; you can point to studies that prove it. If you have to defend the idea, you will develop a structured crossbreeding program, how you will market the calves, where you will get replacement heifers and criteria for bull selection. And why they will return more profit through the years.

No matter how much data you bring to bear on it, you must recognize the counterarguments as well. Skeptics aren't just obstacles to knock down; they are often right. Your partner who spent 40 years developing a purebred herd may have built in some value in predictable quality that your plan will set back.

Sometimes the answer lies in a compromise. Try terminal crossbreeding on some cows, and a greater marketing effort to capture more of the potential premiums from existing genetics. Try out-crossing within that breed to achieve some of your goals.

Skeptics guard tradition on one hand, and seek science-based advancement on the other. You will find a lot of them at the local auction market; they base a lot on visual experience, but take nothing else at face value.

They have heard the auctioneer's claim that calves entering the sale ring have "had all their shots." What would it take to convince them the calves are truly worth more? An ear-tag from a recognized health program might do it, or just knowing the owner stakes his reputation on those calves.

Seeing is believing, and in the profit-driven world, that means seeing green. Whether you are the resident skeptic or blessed with the need to justify your actions to another, information is the key to that vault.

Next time in *Black Ink*, we'll take another look at weaning. Questions? Call toll-free at 877-241-0717 or e-mail steve@certifiedangusbeef.com.

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