

The SEARCH for



Brookover Feedyards Staying Ahead of the Curve

BY BETTY JO GIGOT



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E.C. Brookover jumped the gun on our interview and was already pondering beef industry questions when I got there — namely, "What effect will the opening of the Canadian border have on the prices of feeders and finished cattle, and what will the time frame be?" Brookover was turning over in his mind the totally diverse opinions he has gathered on the issue, but like many, wasn't able to foresee the feeder market's future.

The answer to the Canadian question is yet to be seen but E.C. Brookover, Brookover Enterprises at Garden City, Kan., has definite ideas on some of the other issues the cattle feeding industry faces today.

"I think individual animal identification will eventually be an advantage to the industry," Brookover said. "It will be kind of like going from manual record keeping to managing information on the computer. We won't like it, and

the transition will be painful. Once we're there though, we will wonder why it took so long."

Brookover feels the same way about BSE testing. If the customer is willing to pay for it, get to it. "I am in favor of doing whatever satisfies the customer and the consumer. We need to provide whatever the public and customers want in the meat case."

An Era of Changes

Brookover recounted the changes his company has encountered recently. "In the last year, our feedyard fed an incredible variation of cattle. We fed everything from 350-pound Holstein calves to 1,100-pound cows. Our customers sent them to us because the value got high and they identified opportunities. From a feedyard viewpoint, it has definitely been a challenge."

Another change that needs consideration,

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E.C. BROOKOVER,
MANAGING PARTNER

according to Brookover, is stocker cattle coming in from Mexico. With the new 30-months-of-age rule for slaughter, stocker operators have to decide how big to build stockers before taking them to the feedyard. They can't afford to keep them around too long; those cattle need to get to finish weight quickly.

“You couldn't run fast enough these days to get me to buy a cow, but they are selling very well across the country. The lean meat market is amazingly strong right now, but we choose to pass.”

Looking into the future, Brookover Enterprises is considering the economic feasibility of producing natural beef, as well as source-verified, breed-specific cattle.

Brookover is also implementing the use of ultrasound, at the request of one of his customers, as a way to bring more dollars back per head. He has to admit that he had a “not so good experience” using ultrasound ten years ago and his partner at the time never let him forget it.

“Every time we would start into a project, he would say, ‘why don't we get one of those fancy machines to make the decision’,” Brookover recounted. Obviously, listening to their customers is a way of life at Brookover, who offers any number of feeding programs and marketing possibilities.

A History of Innovation

Brookover is impressed with the technology that has come to the industry in the past few years and knows that more is coming down the pike. He thinks that issues such as BSE will make technology develop even faster.

“Brookover has a history of innovation,” Brookover said. “We were always building something and trying to make it work.”

Earl Brookover, the company's founder, had a vision of an oasis in the desert surrounding Garden City, and that vision came true in his lifetime. He knew that commercial feedyards, like the one he started in 1951 north of Garden City, would thrive with the ability of farmers to use the underground water available from the Ogallala Aquifer. Brookover was right and the area became a mecca for cattle feeding and processing.

“Dad, although an ultra-conservative, was always open-minded about change,” Brookover said. “He told me dozens of times that you only need one really good deal in a lifetime, and the north feedyard was his.”

The company today is in the hands of E.C., and his son, Ty, along with a very well-trained and loyal group of employees who “make it happen every day.” With a one-time capacity of 120,000 head and three feedyards in two states, it takes everyone working together to get it done every day, in a way that keeps with the changing times. ▀