

Keynote Address

The Cattleman's Last Stand



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I am here because I am interested in the future of the beef industry as it relates to the economics of millions of cattlemen and the health and welfare of mankind. It has a direct and obvious relationship to you as bovine practitioners. You, as a respected leader in your community, may have the strongest influence.

Historically, healthy people and strong, free nations have been beef eaters. More than two-thirds of the earth's surface is adaptable only to foragers, ruminant animals that can convert roughages into high quality protein foods, the key to healthy diets.

I am concerned today because this industry that contributes so much to the quality of life is being threatened by outside forces with which cattlemen, and the beef industry, are unable to cope.

If I get a bit emotional and reactionary this morning, then attribute it to the fact that I have given considerable thought to the plight of the cattleman and I want to motive you to do the same.

I am concerned because of our industry's lack of organization, inability to adapt, lacking answers to simple questions, and our inability to defend our industry and our product from the derogatory onslaught of the politicians and the pseudo-consumer activists. I am concerned about the complacency to follow the prosperity we now see.

We are completing the longest down cycle in cattle numbers in 75 years. For the first time in history numbers of cows will bottom out lower than when the cycle began. Projected figures are for about 111 million cattle January 1, 1979, down from 131 million, and to slide next year into a low of 109 million.

Prospects for \$1,000 commercial cows, \$1.25 feeder calves, and 80¢ fed cattle should turn things around by the end of 1979.

Granted, it looks great now for the beef industry. Numbers are down, prices are up and we feel we are in the driver's seat for 6 to 10 years. Cattlemen find it profitable to pay for herd health and will so long as it is economically feasible.

But what then? Do we wait for the next cycle and the next wreck or do we do something about it? Let me draw you a brief scenario of the beef industry as I see it.

It's been nearly 450 years since the first Mexican cow splashed her way across the Rio Grande. As she paused to swat a persistent fly and munch the tender grass that Texas spring morning, we observe the first stage of a romantic scenario unparalleled in the history of animal agriculture.

Although the Longhorn cow was not of proud pedigree, she provided the genesis for modern beef production.

The Longhorn cow fills a unique place in the history of American animal husbandry. She became the genetic base for the country's 50 million cows. She provided the hardiness, immunity and adaptability the like of which has never been possessed by any other breed or species of domesticated livestock. She was the product of her environment. (Frank Dobie, author of a history of the Longhorn, said, "In America cattle live for the sake of man—but in other countries, man lives for the sake of his cattle.")

Cattlemen Too Must Adapt

If cattlemen would read the story of the Longhorn cow, they can learn another of history's great lessons. Adaptability was her greatest asset.

Like the Longhorn, the men that produced beef also adapted to a changing environment or they became extinct.

In the last four years we have lost many cattlemen who could not read the signs of winter and who refused to drift south or grow a winter coat. Only the survivors read the signs and adapted.

While visiting the English Royal Show this July we saw a banner above a tent that read, "The Society for the Preservation of Rare Breeds."

Inside we observed several species of animals that were indeed rare. One was a breed of sheep—almost extinct—that had four horns. Nature had for some unknown reason endowed this critter with not just one gene for the inheritance of horns, but two genes. I wondered: If this oddity was still in existence in some remote corner of the world, then how many others might there have been in years past that have gone the way of the dinosaur or the mastodon as their descendants found it impossible to adapt to the changing environment? And how many might have survived and even multiplied if they had been able to innovate and create?

As one thought led to another, I began to wonder: Why not an organization for the preservation of rare breeds of people?

The life of the cattleman was tough but simple in the early days. Charles Goodnight, 125 years ago, or

about 1850, needed only a horse, a rope, a running iron and lots of guts. But that's not enough today.

For the first 50 years the cattleman lived a fairly stable existence. He knew who his enemies were and could brace himself for the expected pressures of life. It was about 25 years later when he met his first test of adaptability when *wire changed the west*.

It was a tough adjustment for cattlemen that wasn't really accomplished for some 25 years. This innovation resulted in lawsuits, murders and range wars before the cattleman learned that by fencing he could restore order, mark land ownership, control breeding animals and better manage his ranch.

Challenge of New Forces

Today he has the toughest adjustments to make because he is being challenged by new forces, more sinister and more subtle than any of the past. He is so caught in the crossfire of a social, political and economic battle that he at present is incapable of even a meager defense, much less an aggressive attack.

The cow has provided us with an interesting scenario which began thousands of years before Christ. She was the first form of security to be used for legal tender, even before silver and gold. She became the symbol of wealth and prosperity. Even yet in India a man is measured by the number of cows he owns first and the number of wives second.

Throughout history the cow has been the source of folklore, epic, idol worship and the possession of the rich royalty. With such a prestigious background and public image, it's small wonder that modern politicians have selected her as their most popular target of abuse to appeal to what they term the "common man."

Politicians are on a perpetual search for issues that offer political expediency—answers that sound good.

The U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, traditionally one of the main supporters of the farmers and scientific agriculture, has now "gone consumerist." The assistant secretary of agriculture, Ms. Carol Foreman, is one of the leaders of the attack on bacon. So far, she has not displayed any concern about nitrates and nitrites in vegetables.

Dr. Thomas H. Jukes is not one to pussyfoot. Asked to speak about the U.S. dietary goals proposed by Sen. George McGovern and the Senate nutrition committee, Dr. Jukes told a recent newspaper food editors conference in Los Angeles, "My position is that the goals are misleading and worthless.

"They are based on false reasoning. They are put together on preconceptions. This does not surprise me. The goals were made up by Senator McGovern's staff, not by trained nutritionists."

The dietary goals advocate less meat, less whole milk, less fats and more cereal grains. In other words, go in the direction of diets consumed by Third World countries, where protein deficiency and anemia are common and where life expectancy is short.

The biggest cancer problem is cigarettes. The strongest carcinogen in food is aflatoxin made by molds which occur in cereals and peanuts, foods that are praised in the dietary goals. *Consumer Report* for August points out that the USDA pays \$250 per ton support for moldy peanuts. Elsewhere in USDA, nitrites in meats are being attacked by Carol Tucker Foreman (assistant secretary of agriculture). Most nitrites, probably more than 95%, come from vegetables, saliva and our own intestinal bacteria.

The cattleman and farmer have become the modern political ploy, the perfect sacrifice for the altar of cheap politics, the favorite toy for occupants of the puzzle palace on the Potomac.

There have been at least 10 direct acts of government intervention designed to undermine the market price of cattle in the last five years.

It all started with Nixon and his paranoid road show of assistants who searched high and low for a scapegoat to blame for inflation. They needed a decoy to mislead the cantankerous consumer advocates. The decoy had to be one of sufficient prestige to serve as an acceptable sacrifice and of insufficient strength and organization to fight back.

They looked around and could not find any one more disorganized than the cattleman. He became the perfect sacrifice and we have not seen the last of government meddling and persecution yet. Mr. Carter has learned his lessons well. The cattleman is fair game and both parties have declared open season.

Government meddling manipulates our market without so much as giving us a reason.

This summer, with only three months of recovery, the cattle industry had already been branded as the hit target for inflation. Now, after two years of hard work on the part of cattlemen, a bill that would have served both as an incentive to cattlemen to rebuild herds and to help balance supply to the consumer was vetoed by the President. It was overwhelmingly passed by the House and Senate but was apparently delayed getting to the President to prevent the opportunity to override a veto. This is the fifth time in four years that cattlemen have been used as a political pawn.

Now, while the American cattleman struggles under all the handicaps an unsympathetic government can burden him with, he resists, in fact rejects, government subsidies in the name of free enterprise and is forced to compete with foreign cattle industries that are subsidized by their governments.

How long will we allow ourselves to be mauled in the political arena? How long will we be prostituted by shallow men who are motivated by personal gain and who change their loyalties with every changing wind?

The cattleman, with all good intentions, has become the paper tiger in the political arena. His traditional image as a hardy, tough, virile adversary is a thing of the past. He fights for existence in a different environment in the modern world of

organization and has failed to arm himself for the battle. *He hasn't won a major battle in Washington for ten years, because political expediency determines most decisions.*

So while this exercise in economic sadism and play for short-term political goals unfolds in Washington, everyone loses. The cattleman loses his incentive to produce. The consumer loses his supply of beef and becomes dependent on a foreign source.

There are some things we must remember. We must remember the cattleman's collapse in 1974.

Remember that on February 14, 1978, the President said, *"The only truly viable method of improving the agricultural economic picture is through the free market system. Further government involvement will not cure any of the ills of the marketplace."* He said he had no intention of interfering with the free market system.

Remember Carol Foreman, who was appointed as assistant secretary of agriculture and whose primary debt is to George Meany. It is George Meany and other labor leaders' insistence on low prices for food and high salaries for union workers that is one of the chief causes of inflation and may be a key to the President's recent action against cattlemen.

Remember the last referendum for a beef self-help program which was lost because we, as an industry, didn't work hard enough.

Time for Attitude and Action

Remember, things won't get any better until cattlemen develop clout. We must be well enough organized that it becomes politically inexpedient for politicians and bureaucrats to hang the cattleman. I believe we can—our industry has a history of success and survival. We have the resources if we utilize them. We must turn our negatives into positives. Our goal should be to acquire leverage for the cattle industry. Archimedes said it a thousand years ago, "Give me a solid place to stand and a pole long enough and I can move the world."

But then there are so many of us that have the capability of seeing all the positives but see so little of them. We hear and rationalize all the negatives, but still have great difficulty in being positive and recognizing all the tremendous opportunities we have.

In the bicentennial year I was addressing the National Association of Livestock Marketers in Hershey, Pa. The theme of the entire conference was "Marketing in Century III." I spent two days listening to speeches about the population explosion and how we were running out of food. Speeches about the threat of growing government regulations, higher taxation, inflation and the threat of World War III.

I was so fed up with negativism on a national scope that I changed my speech. I told them I was fed up with listening to tired old men talk about failure, that I wanted to hear someone say there was hope for the future. I wanted to hear someone say there were solutions to our problems. I wanted to hear someone

say there was hope for the world, for my children and my grandchildren. I wanted to hear someone say there were still innovators and creators and doers left in this world that hadn't given up.

I had just returned from a trip to Russia and developed a fresh vision of this country in which we live. If you can't see the good things that we have in this land, then go to Russia, or to India or to Pakistan. If you stay there long enough, you will thank God for this land and for your community and the influence that it has had in the world. It's worth salvaging, regardless of the sacrifice.

This country in the beginning was fresh, clean, rich with natural resources and unpolluted. Problems are people-created and all people problems have people solutions. We don't have enough people talking about what is good about this country. That is where you and I are negligent. We are letting the negative minority, and the disbelievers and the unfaithful pollute the atmosphere in which we live. We need to become a vocal, active and assertive people, to believe in something good and great and tell everyone about it. When you hear the complainers, grippers and criticizers tearing your organization down, tell them to knock it off. They are polluting your environment and hurting your business.

I was listening to Ray Charles singing that classical song, "America the Beautiful," in his very unique way, as only he can do it. And when he reached those lines, "America, America, God shed his grace on thee, and crowned thy good with brotherhood from sea to shining sea," I realized then that here was a man, black and blind. He was physically unable to see the beautiful and was exposed to hearing so much of the negative. But, still, he had acquired a special insight and understanding of what this country is and what it can be. *Only people that are the product of great sacrifice know and appreciate the meaning of life.* I'm reminded of Will Rogers and Charles Russell—one with the ability to see the humor in every tragedy, the other with the talent to see primitive life in the raw and leave us a beautiful picture.

The cattle industry is under stress but we have the resources to overcome. The golden moments of life are those when we are under stress. The stress test brings out the best or the worst in us. It really depends on one's attitude and source of strength.

Abraham Lincoln was under stress when he said, "There are times when the burdens of this office become so heavy that I am forced to my knees because I know of no place else to go."

Time to Act

Now is the time for cattlemen to act. Now, before the next wreck. We may have our last golden opportunity during the next few years of relative good times. Time is short.

The philosopher said about *time*, "Lost yesterday some time between sunrise and sunset, two golden hours, each set with 60 diamond minutes. No reward

offered, for they are gone forever.” The next three years may determine the future of the beef industry. The politicians and union leaders have brainwashed the citizenry and it’s beginning to affect our own attitudes. We must be positive but realistic. We must be flexible but firm. We must be strong and well-organized but fair and understanding.

Specific Goals

We can control the direction of our industry if we are organized, coordinated and determined about our goals—goals that will see our industry serving and improving the quality of life around the world.

The following points are offered for cattlemen to consider in reaching those goals and saving our industry. We’ve got to level the peaks and the valleys of the cattle cycle in order to avoid the next wreck. I suggest:

1. That all cattlemen in every segment of the beef production and marketing chain become strong members and supporters of the organization to which they have the closest ties.

2. That all segments, organizations and individual cattlemen become supporters of a stronger National Cattlemen’s Association to enhance the industry’s efforts to present a united front.

3. That all organizations representing segments of the beef production and marketing chain support the passage of the Beeferendum this next year. Only through collective organization will cattlemen be able to finance a program of data-gathering and communication that will reinforce their efforts in telling the true story of beef.

4. That cattlemen sponsor a high level, scientific study of all of the internal and external factors that affect the supply and demand of beef. This study should be done by an internationally-known, independent organization with high credibility.

5. That the industry consider a modern approach to bargaining and upward integration. One study showed that the cow-calf operator has about \$2,900 per cow unit invested. The packer, the feedlot operator, and the retailer have about \$350 invested. For an added \$350 per cow unit, or a total of \$3,250, the cow-calf producer could own his product from the pasture to the platter.

6. That each beef-related organization seek a higher level of expertise and professionalism in their administrative staffs to keep pace with industry, unions and corporations. The beef business is a 200 billion dollar industry and deserves the highest level of professionalism and performance its policy makers and administrative people can provide.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let me say this. We are an industry of little people but collectively we can pack a wallop. Even honest, well-meaning people in this world of super-organizations must have clout. Eighty percent of the beef in this country is produced in herds of fewer than 50 cows. Little things, however, if timed

and directed can be most effective.

You can help. *Don’t underestimate the value of little things.*

A tea kettle singing on the stove was the beginning of the steam engine.

A shirt waving on the clothesline was the beginning of the balloon, a forerunner of the Graf Zeppelin.

It was a spider web strung across a garden path that suggested the suspension bridge that spans the mighty rivers of the world.

It was just a lantern swinging in a tower that suggested the pendulum.

It was an apple falling from a tree that suggested the idea of the law of gravity.

It was lightning flashing in a storm cloud with a kite swinging a door key that became laboratory instruments in the discovery of electricity.

All the music, the great music of the world, comes from eight little notes.

All the world’s literature comes from 26 letters of the alphabet.

It was Julia Fletcher Carney who gave us the poem about little things: *“Little drops of water, little grains of sand, make the mighty ocean in the pleasant land and so the mighty minutes, though humble they may be, make the mighty ages of eternity.”*

Our country doesn’t have a money problem, it doesn’t have an educational problem, it doesn’t have a trade problem. You know what kind of a problem our country has? It has a heart problem and is about ready for intensive care. Our leaders are marching to the beat of political expediency.

Our problems are people problems and only people can solve them. As the comic strip character Pogo says, *“We have met the enemy and he is us.”*

We are made of the same genetic material as our predecessors. They adapted and so can we. We just have to get our thinking straightened out.

I would call your attention to a negative philosophy called *“Murphy’s Law.”* It states that *“if anything can go wrong, it will go wrong.”* Then there is an updated version called *“O’Toole’s Law.”* It simply states that *“Murphy was an optimist.”*

There are doomers and gloomers who say the world is five billion years old, it is two minutes till midnight and the end is near. True, the world may be five billion years old, but it likely has 10 billion more years to live. Therefore, it is not two minutes till midnight, but 8:00 a.m., the sun has risen and it’s time to go to work.”

