

Black Ink Auld Lang Syne

MIRANDA REIMAN

WOOSTER, OHIO



Take good food, turn up the tunes, add a handful of tried and true buddies and a reason to celebrate, and you have a party. Everyone's definition of a good bash is different, however.

Maybe you're a little more outgoing and that "handful" number would need to include the whole neighborhood, or maybe you'd rather celebrate with a quiet evening at home with family. It doesn't matter how you do it, just that you take that break, appreciate what and where you've been and what lies ahead.

The end of the calendar year allows you to evaluate times gone by or as the old Scotsman wrote, "auld lang syne." You might focus on the past 12 months.

Not to make the statement too broad, but the beef industry has much to celebrate right now. Prices are up and international demand is strong. Retail leads on the domestic front but the foodservice trade is recovering and research continues to show consumer preference for high-quality beef.

As you look back on your year, what were the highlights?

You can't control things like weather and grass conditions, but maybe you managed them right. Maybe you struck the right balance between stocking rates and feed resources.

You can't predict the markets, but you can try to position yourself to take advantage of seasonality or lock in a floor price. Were you able to sell near the top of the market? Or maybe you're feeling good because the calves are well adjusted to feedyard life. If you built solid rela-

tionships, you're now reaping the benefits.

Maybe you used expected progeny differences (EPDs) to really study up on your bull options, or maybe you had the first calves born from artificial insemination (AI) this year – all with the hopes of making directional change toward a product that gets repeat buyers at a premium. Knowing that you're improving your herd gives you a sense of satisfaction.

So pop the cork, crack open a cold one or clink your cocoa mug with your spouse—toast to the year behind and the year ahead. A little celebrating is healthy, especially when it goes hand in hand with reflection and assessment.

As you identify what went well in 2010, see if there are ways to build on that current success.

Getting some carcass data on your calves is an excellent starting point, but it's what you do with that information that will make all the difference. This could be the year you ask for a little advice in analyzing those marbling scores, ribeye area and fat thickness numbers.

Weaning the calves at home helps reduce stress and ensure health later on, but maybe you made some mental notes about how to make that go more smoothly next time around. Better yet, maybe you wrote them down and discussed with your partners. You could make upgrades in facilities or pre-weaning vaccination programs or devote more manpower to the project.

The idea is just to take stock of all that has happened, and use that to influence all that will.

Success breeds success, so use last year as a springboard for accomplishments worthy of still more celebration a year from now. Δ

MIRANDA REIMAN: Industry Information Specialist for Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB)



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