

Black Ink: Dream Big

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I wonder what the creators of The Jetsons would have thought about Skype or FaceTime on iPhones, or any number of other video chat services now available? George Jetson could actually call up Jane in that manner today.

The animated cartoon wrapped up in 1987, before the advent of fit-in-your pocket cell phones or wireless internet and way before chatting virtually face-to-face in real-time, via built-in computer cameras.

But just a few decades later, many of those wildest imaginations are real. When the second of the Hanna-Barbara duo (the company that also created the likes of the Tom and Jerry, The Flintstones, Smurfs and Scooby-Doo) died in 2006, Roombas were already cleaning floors while you were gone to work. So who needs Rosie the robot?

And so the trend continues. What seems a cartoon impossibility in one decade becomes commonplace in the next.

Before it becomes reality though, somebody has to dream that big.

There is the rat race called everyday chores and ranch improvements. In the bustle, have you stopped to imagine what your herd could be like in 5, 10 or 20 years?

It would be pretty great if you could identify which cows just won't make good mothers before you give them the chance to express that. It might make that calving season snowstorm a tick more bearable.

What about a quick, chute-side blood test that could tell you which females will have calves less likely to get sick? Or even if the bulls came with that information. Think about the marketing possibilities: "Hello, Mr. Feedyard Manager. I have a set of feeder calves that are all from sire

XYZ, proven to have progeny more resistant to BRD."

What if that same instantaneous DNA test could tell you which cattle would grade well? "Mr. Feeder?" Oh, never mind. If that technology helps you make cattle that good and you can eliminate all that risk, you might decide it's the year to own them yourself.

The list could go on...tools designed to create cattle that won't bloat, that have increased efficiencies and more tender meat.

Genetic selection is a big component, but don't stop there. What if an implant not only increased average daily gain but improved marbling? What about a new feeding technique that trains cattle to eat the right amount at precisely the right time to maximize gains?

As you read this, there is probably somebody thinking about the above advances. There is a scientist painstakingly developing a DNA test and checking its validity. There is a researcher studying how marbling is formed so he can find ways to get more of it. There are people dreaming big, not just because they're paid to, but because they have that same spark for the science that you have for your cattle. The beef business is your shared passion.

Folks used to talk about hitting 100 percent Choice like it was a hardly achievable gold standard.

Not anymore. Some producers reach more than 50 percent Prime as routine. The change may not be as visible as today's electronic gadgets, but in the cattle world, what seemed impossible is now attainable. And that's sure to happen again.

One thing is certain: in 2022 it will look different than it does today. In 2062 (the year of The Jetsons setting), it will likely look dramatically different. Maybe your heifers will tag their own calves.

Hey, we're dreaming big, right?

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