

Uniformity Is An Elusive, But Worthy Goal In Cattle Herds

MT. VERNON, MO.

Cattle producers – whether they are a one-bull cow herd owner in southwest Missouri or a 1000 cow rancher in Montana – like to have a uniform herd.

There's no doubt when it's time to market cattle, a uniform set of calves, stockers, finished cattle or bred heifers attract more buyer interest according to Eldon Cole, a livestock specialist with University of Missouri Extension.

“That buyer interest translates into more dollars in the bank account especially if the cattle are uniformly good. The trick is to make sure they are good,” said Cole.

Beef industry analysts even talk about the need to develop more uniformity or consistency in the product. The responsibility for developing consistency starts with the cow-calf operator who produces the feeder calf.

“Recently, I was driving down a road in the area and saw an interesting assortment of cows in a pasture. I stopped and took a few pictures thinking about the breed diversity represented in the 10 or 12 head that were visible from the road,” said Cole.

The picture shows the influence of Brahman, Simmental, Scotch Highland, Angus, Red Angus, Hereford and perhaps even Ayrshire and Milking Shorthorn.

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Diversity in cattle

If you study the accompanying picture you can probably identify the influence of Brahman, Simmental, Scotch Highland, Angus, Red Angus, Hereford and perhaps even Ayrshire and Milking Shorthorn. I don't know how many cows the owner has and the exact breed makeup, but regardless of the breed of bull he uses, the calf crop will have lots of variation in their performance and appearance. Marketing them for top value will be challenging.

Photos by Eldon Cole, livestock specialist with University of Missouri Extension.

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Years ago, according to Cole, breeding or developing a consistent product involved a relative few breeds of beef cattle. It was fairly easy to follow the purebred route and have an all black Angus, straight Hereford, Shorthorn herd and send a uniform set of calves or yearling to market.

“As time went by and different breeds came on the scene, uniformity and consistency became a greater challenge,” said Cole.

Today, however, those challenges can be met with the technology of expected prog-

eny difference (EPD), heat synchronization /fixed-time artificial insemination, high accuracy EPD bulls, embryo transfer, ultrasound use and DNA analysis.

“Those technologies can even be put to work in small, diverse herds such as the one represented in the picture. The calves from the first-cross may not be peas in a pod but they should help the herd owner move towards a more uniform, consistent herd,” said Cole.

Cole recommends a visit with your extension livestock specialist about the tools you can use to develop a set of calves that make order buyers sit up and take notice. Δ



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