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Board Commentary

by Raymond Prescott, District 8 Director - Southeast

The BEST Thing About Red Angus!

"I'll tell you the best thing about Red Angus...," the customer commented as he strolled through a group of yearling bulls. My ears perked up as I listened intently for this repeat bull customer to finish the sentence. Hopefully, his comment would give me insight into what he valued most about the breed of cattle that I have loved for most of my life. Would he tell me about how uniform his calf crop looked last year, as his neighbor had already declared? Would he focus on the added value that the age and source verified Red Angus Feeder Calf Certification Program had created for those calves? Or maybe he'd zero in on the calving ease he'd been experiencing or the way his replacement heifers were doing their jobs? He might be impressed with how those red hided cattle were out eating even during the heat of the day. "Red Angus cattle do so many things right," I thought. "There's no telling what this fella's fixin' to say".

Then it came, as he looked over at me to make sure I was listening. "They're so gentle!" he exclaimed. What? Disposition! Did he just say that a calm temperament was the best thing about Red Angus? As I politely nodded my head, the wheels inside it started to move in rapid rotation. Sure, these cattle truly are unflappable and calm in nearly every circumstance, but that's not my favorite thing about them, or is it? I've worked around Red Angus cattle for most of my life, and the great disposition that this cattle producer was expounding on was something that I had come to expect from the breed and take for granted. The comment really made me think. Had the quiet temperaments of our Red Angus somehow robbed me of some of the excitement and thrills that other cattlemen experienced while they performed their daily tasks around their "high strung" bovines? As I thought it over, I realized that I had been very fortunate over the years. I've never seen the inside of a hospital or emergency medical vehicle because of a run in with Red Angus. I've never even had an extra work load because stampeding cattle tore down my fences.

I began to pay closer attention to examples of good disposition in Red

Angus cattle. Another customer shouted "you be careful!" as I pushed a yearling bull through the load out pen and onto the trailer for his much awaited ride to the cow pasture. The young bull moved casually to the rear of his carriage and hopped aboard with little if any resistance. A few weeks later, as a friend and I observed a junior heifer show, he commented that my daughter's heifer sure did behave well. He barely believed me when I agreed and commented that the 1250 lb female had first been introduced to a halter about a month earlier. In addition to convenience and safety, scientific research recently proved that calmer cattle have better feed to gain ratios and better marbling scores than nervous cattle. I believe that this could be part of the underlying success of Red Angus in the feedlot and on the rail. Whether I can prove it with research or not, good dispositions in animals that outweigh us as much as twenty to one, "can't hurt anything" as Dad would say.

I should point out that calmness and meekness in these great cattle should not be confused with weakness. Red Angus females are excellent mothers that are very protective of their calves. There's no doubt that a Red Angus mother is ready, willing and able to "leave a lasting impression" if she believes her calf is threatened. Even so, these animals' intelligence gives them an uncanny ability to trust me as I process the newborn calves, but not trust the coyote or buzzard that's waiting on the next hill.

There are many things to like about Red Angus, but perhaps one of their most valuable strengths has gone unnoticed by many like myself for many years. As Red Angus breeders we don't need to forget this wonderful characteristic of our cattle when we start counting our blessings. It's hard to put a value on disposition, but lost time accidents, torn up fences, and hospital visits don't come cheap! It's not particularly fun to perform routine herd work on excited and irritable cattle, either. In fact, it can make for excited and irritable people, which obviously lessens the quality and in extreme cases the length of life! A close friend and mentor of mine once put it this way. "Life's too short to put up with crazy cattle!" If you're obliged to agree with that and you don't already own 'em, you need to give Red Angus a try. You'll be glad you did. ■