

Fast Changing Cattle Industry May Be Changing Too Fast

America's cattlemen are paying more for changes — sometimes called technological advances — than they bargained for. Stress in cattle, caused by shipping, handling, feedlot surfaces, and other external factors, result in a loss of weight in cattle and an economic loss to cattlemen.

As fast as cattlemen work to select stock with the genetic ability to thrive in modified environments, the environment is changing. This was the suggestion made by Dr. H. L. Self, Professor of Animal Science, Iowa State University, in the current issue of The Merck Agricultural Memo. The Memo is published by Feed Products, Merck Chemical Division as a service to animal health and nutrition.

The Memo reports on a series of studies of stress situations leading to shrinkage made by Dr. Self, professor in charge of outlying farms at Iowa State. He found that an average of 121 pounds of beef was lost in transit in one animal.

This figure was developed after buying an 800 pound steer which shrunk 9% or 72 pounds. After feeding the animal for 120 days, it weighed 1,080 pounds. It was then shipped to market and lost 45% or 49 pounds in transit. The total shrink loss was 121 pounds.

Dr. Self observed that the effects of shipping, handling, weather, feedlot surfaces and housing, even cattle management, may cause stress in animals. Most of these factors have been studied by Dr. Self and other experts. For example, confinement studies at Oklahoma State University indicated steers adjusted readily to slatted floors. The steers were fed free-choice in self-feeders. Carcasses showed no unusual bruises or other damage due to confinement.

On cold winter days, cattle may crowd into a poorly ventilated barn and "steam." The mass of bodies and lack of moving air causes this high degree of heat and humidity. When the animals return to the cold outside, the moisture in their coat either freezes or rapidly evaporates and causes super-cooling. This chilling, in turn, causes stress and frequently leads to influenza or pneumonia.

Tests in Ohio showed that cattle bedded with straw on a solid floor under cover gained slightly faster than cattle on slatted floors. In another test, yearling steers with access to overhead shelter gained an average of 0.4 pounds per steer per day faster than unsheltered controls.

Most of the tests showed both advantages as well as disadvantages. For example, the test of bedding cattle on straw showed weight gain, but there were 12 cases of foot rot among steers on bedding, while none occurred on the slatted floor.

The stress situations have been with cattlemen a long time. The first great change in livestock, says Dr. Self, was then domestication. Then, many years later, another change was made. The cattle were transported from one point to another. Since this change, the tempo of new, artificial environments increased rapidly. Trail drives led to rail then

truck transportation. The future, says Dr. Self, is in air transportation. This will create a whole new set of problems for cattle and cattlemen. For the cattle must adjust to every change. Until this adjustment is made, cattlemen face the possibility of shrink or weight loss in their animals.

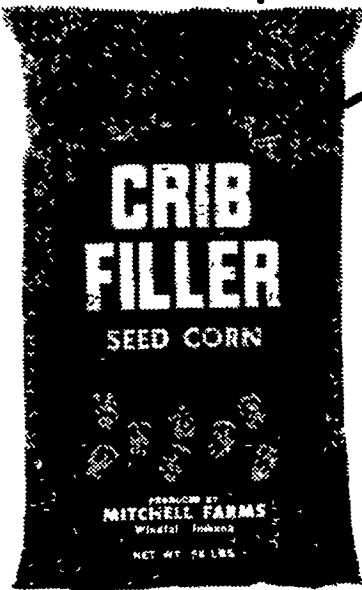
In order to overcome the loss, cattlemen have been selecting stock with the genetic ability to thrive in modified environments. Now, suggests Dr. Self, the modifications are coming too fast.

Since there are so many variables to consider — and more being introduced every day — Dr. Self says that, in the final analysis, each cattle feeder must make his own decision about housing, shipping and handling on the basis of his needs, ability, financial resources and personal preferences. But, scientists will help by developing the information that will aid the feeder in making his decision.

Pennsylvania dairymen will have a chance to vote in the state referendum regarding a proposed milk marketing program. All milk producers will receive a ballot by mail giving them a chance to vote on the plan to deduct one-half of one percent of the gross milk check (less hauling) for the promotion of milk throughout the country. This vote will come early in December. Our Extension Service is scheduling four (4) meetings throughout Lancaster County to provide an opportunity for all milk producers to become better acquainted with this milk marketing program. Dairymen are urged to attend one of these meetings. We are not attempting to tell the producer how to vote, but we are interested in getting him better informed so that he will be able to cast a more knowledgeable vote. The proposal requires at least two-thirds of those voting to favor the program providing it represents at least 50% of the production of those voting. The important thing is to become acquainted with the program and then **VOTE.**

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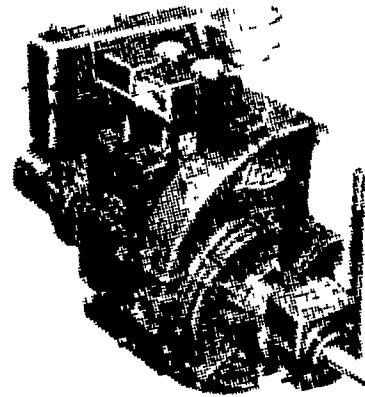
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