

Young farmer program teaches beef management

By DIETER KRIEG

NEW HOLLAND - "We're not telling you what you should do; what we are doing is suggesting that you consider some of those newer research findings in your individual operations. We want to keep you beef producers in this area right on top," offered Donald Robinson, coordinator of Young Farmer adult education programs at Garden Spot High School.

Robinson made the remarks during the first in a continuing series of adult education classes made available free of charge to farmers in the Eastern Lancaster County School District. Similar programs are available at other schools where agriculture is taught. Young Farmers, the adult educational arm of the Future Farmers of America, is an organization which furthers educational and business goals of members.

"Anyone who is willing to learn can be a Young Farmer," says a popular introduction to the growing organization.

At Tuesday evening's meeting, here, farmers gathered to hear the latest about management practices, beef cattle handling equipment, feed research, heat suppressants, and parasite control. As in any good educational procedure, Young Farmer sessions are a two-way street. Robinson repeatedly asked for input from those in attendance, searching them out for their opinions and observations.

Offering professional views on handling equipment, feed research, and heat suppressants were Reist Mummau, Tim Horn, and Ken Kurjiaka, respectively.

Mummau, a Lancaster Countian with extensive experience in beef cattle handling, described various products which he offers for sale at his Elizabethtown area farm. He noted that such products as headgates, squeeze chutes, and crowding corrals are becoming more and more popular in this area because of the professional and efficient touch they lend to the business.

"Handling facilities are handy for implanting, blood testing, veterinary work, etc., and any situation which calls for being able to handle cattle," said Mummau who admits to having roped several thousand head during his years out West. The new mechanized method of catching animals is more efficient, he acknowledged.

"The headgate doesn't involve a great deal of expense and yet it's very effective," the cattleman pointed out. He brought one along to the school to demonstrate its use. Squeeze gates cost a bit more but offer the additional advantages of being able to do "the complete job" on cattle, such as foot work, Caesarean operations, etc. Although the emphasis of Mummau's presentation was beef cattle handling, he pointed out that sales to dairymen have increased considerably during the past year.

Mummau suggests that crowding facilities be arranged in a comparatively

remote section of the feed lot. The individual farmer can then proceed to work from there and continue with as much of an elaborate system as he cares to invest in. The narrow end of the crowding facilities should be 30 to 32 inches wide, and as long as is economically feasible. Mummau prefers long chutes for the simple reason that cattle can be worked in groups that way, rather than singly.

Robinson, in introducing the next topics of the evening, cited studies from Michigan State University which compare a two-phase feeding system with more conventional programs. The feeding procedure in question called for an all silage ration during the early weeks, followed by a silage and grain combination in later weeks. Studies at MSU, which have since been documented at other institutions, show that the rate of gain is similar as with more conventional feeding plans, but that 1200 pounds less corn silage was used in the 2-phase

procedure. Researchers also determine that the experiments resulted in more efficient use of corn silage itself, cattle shot ahead in growth when grain was introduced, and that rate of gain was highest when cattle are the heaviest.

The advantages of this two-stage feeding program will change with the costs as such inputs as corn, supplements, NPN, etc., Robinson pointed out. But the 2-phase feeding system "will never be far from the most profitable" the study concluded.

Hay may only be necessary in the feedlot when trying to attract timid and young calves to the feed bunk, another portion of the study concluded. Although hay is a popular feed with many cattlemen in this area, some studies show that hay feeding can reduce gains by 11 per cent. Participants in the ensuing discussion agreed that hay is the best way to get calves started, regardless of the source of the cattle and method of feeding. But studies

nevertheless indicate that there is no advantage to feeding hay when rates of gain are compared.

Tim Horn, who along with Frank Campbell represented Pennfield Feeds at Tuesday's Young Farmer meeting, cautioned the cattlemen, however, to make any switch from hay to corn gradually lest digestive tract balances be upset.

Another topic of presentation was heat suppressants. The specific product mentioned was melegesterol acetate, commonly known as MGA. A progestational hormone, the product keeps heifers from coming into heat and thereby allows cattlemen who raise heifers to see faster and larger profits. Ken Kurjiaka, representing the Tuco Division of the Upjohn Company, which manufactures MGA, explained that the drug stops the pituitary gland from releasing its lutenizing hormone. Heifers which are on this drug reportedly gain faster, have better feed

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Reist Mummau shows head gate features to New Holland Young Farmers advisor Donald Robinson.

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