

Juniors learn cattle value at mock sale

BY JOYCE BUPP
Staff Correspondent

YORK — It was your classic cattle sale setting..

A string of clean, clipped cattle of various ages stood tied, neatly numbered on the rumps. Potential buyers studied pedigree catalogs with information ranging from incomplete two-year production records to maternal lines with high index and Excellent classifications.

Fresh, aromatic sawdust coated the floor of the roped sale ring. From the sale box came the flowing sounds of an auctioneer in high gear, the sing-song chant interrupted intermittently with pedigree comments and the enthusiastic "Yep!" of a ringman spotting a bidding nod.

But not one single animal changed hands.

Instead, this auction was all of a learning type, as more than two dozen 4-H'ers from York, Adams, Lancaster, Lebanon and Chester Counties met recently at the York 4-H Center for a mock sale and junior dairy workshop. Sponsoring the event was the county's Central Dairy Club and the Extension Service, with animals supplied by the Tom and June Boyer family's Sunnybend Farm.

Before a single bid call went out, the group split into three sections, for a morning devoted to workshops led by area cattle industry experts.

Handling the auctioneering tips workshop was professional auctioneer Mike Weimer, while pedigree specialist Jay Howes taught the session on evaluation of pedigrees. Both are with the Backus Associates cattle appraisal and sales firm.

Michael Sleeper, of Atlantic Breeders Cooperative, led the workshop on type evaluation. All three put heavy emphasis on being realistic about the long term value of an animal.

"Don't get carried away with an animal that's fancy, but doesn't have a good enough pedigree for the long term," Weimer warned the junior dairymen.

Public auctions are reasonably good indicators of fair market prices for cattle, he says. Young buyers wanting to gain more experience in appraising cattle should get sale catalogs ahead of time, then go through and put a value on each consignment based strictly on the pedigree information.

Arriving at the sale with time to spare allows further study of the consignments on physical appearance. Juniors might see the practice as a sort of game, in which they try to see how close they can come to an animal's selling price through their pedigree and conformation appraisals.

Follow that up, Weimer further suggests, by talking prices over with others, evaluating why certain individuals might have sold higher or lower than expected, since "sales can be spotty."

Repeated exercises of this sort can teach the junior buyer fair price ranges of cattle, and establish a basis for a range of spending when an actual purchase is planned.

There's nothing wrong with waiting a bit before jumping into the bidding action on a potential purchase, says the auctioneer.

"But, get a bid in fairly early, to indicate your interest," he further recommends.

One warning to young buyers is to learn to pay careful attention to the actual price being asked, since part of a successful auction is getting the bidding rapidly moving and having buyers caught up in the excitement and rapid speed of the bidding action.

According to Weimer, an auctioneer will generally open the

bidding on an animal with a call for a price in the range from the animal's appraised value, up to perhaps 25 percent over the appraised value. This is generally prevalent at the beginning of sales.

To help participants better understand and follow the quick-moving auctioneering chants, Weimer had the juniors warm up their voices with auction school tongue twisters and then led them slowly through the sing-song chanting.

Howes echoed Weimer's philosophies about purchases based on pedigree, and guided the 4-H'ers through steps in learning to read the wealth of information in catalogs.

Keys to watch are the last letter of the scoring breakdown, which designate the udder classification, age and potential useful life of a consignment, whether safe in calf, when due to freshen and last date of freshening.

If the animal is a calf with show ring use in mind, birth date is important. Maternal lines are important as well as the sire side, including butterfat and production levels.

Cow index is a measure of
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Matching cattle to their pedigree information, 4-H'ers tried their hands at price appraisal before the regional mock sale.

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