

Livestock Producers Must Learn To Cope With Stress

BY RICHARD BARCZEWSKI
University of Delaware

NEWARK, Del. — Have you ever had one of those days? I mean one of those days when everything goes wrong, or at least not totally right. One of those days where you wished you'd just rolled over and stayed in bed.

Well, I have. I woke up one morning not long ago and realized I'd misplaced my date book. Let me assure you that an extension agent is lost without his date book. After searching for what appeared to be an eternity, I discovered it in the pocket of a recently washed shirt. Needless to say, it was ruined and I wished I could go back to bed.

Later that same day, my wife called to let me know that her truck, which had been in the service department of a local auto dealer for 38 days, had just broken down. This was after the installation of a new engine and traveling just six miles.

Later that same night, our accountant called to inform us that we would need an extension to get our tax returns filed.

Everybody has days like this. Nothing seems to go right. We become irritable and impatient. Emotions run high and we can't relax. These are just a few of the signs associated with stress and I can assure you that I felt them.

So what is stress? It's a term that began in engineering, where it means the capacity to withstand structural strain. With people, stress is more complex. Individuals have different tolerance levels in stressful situations and respond to stress in different ways.

Stress can be a positive thing. Functioning in high gear in emergency situations does little harm provided the stress is short-lived. However, problems arise when you're under heavy strain over a long period of time or face too many stressful events at once. Heavy strain is like when you return from selling a load of market hogs you've worked months raising to optimum condition, only to find that the check you received won't even come close to paying the feed bill.

Generally speaking, the body reacts to stress in many ways. It's important to know how your body responds under pressure so that you can take appropriate action to relieve it.

Physical signs of stress include headaches, fatigue, insomnia, colds, digestive upsets, pounding heart, grinding teeth and tightened muscles — especially in the neck and shoulders.

Mental signs include forgetfulness, dull senses, poor concentration, a negative attitude, confusion, boredom and indifference.

Emotional symptoms of stress include anxiety, depression, mood swings, bad temper, crying spells, irritability, worrying and the blues.

Socially, too much stress can make you feel isolated, resentful, lonely. It can cause you to lash out at others, clam up, nag. It can also lead to lowered sex drive, fewer contacts with friends and using people.

As you can see, we're affected by stress in many ways. Where one person might lash out, someone else may clam up. In my own case, when I feel under too much pressure I tend to get headaches and indigestion. I feel irritable and am likely to lash out verbally at the people around me. Each of us reacts differently to stress. The question is, what can we do to reduce its effects?

First of all, let's accept that stress is here to stay. We've just got to find a way to deal with it. Farmers who are successful stress managers tend to share similar characteristics. They're self-aware. They use a variety of techniques to help them relax. They have many interests, are active and productive. They use and give support, spend time with their families on a regular basis and think positively.

How are you at handling stress? Many of us aren't even aware when we're experiencing it, or we've become so used to it that we ignore the symptoms or accept them as normal. Stress does little harm in the initial stages, but the complications from prolonged

stress can lead to major health problems later in life.

There's plenty of stress in the hog industry. The current market price for hogs is getting lower. Add to this higher feed additive prices and escalating equipment costs, and it's easy to see where stress comes into play in this business. Disease outbreaks as well as unexpected equipment failures also add to the pressure you're under.

So what can you do? Be aware! Learn about stress and how to manage it so it doesn't take a heavy toll on you. The Delaware Cooperative Extension is offering a series of fact sheets on stress management. They were written by extension family specialist Dr. Patricia Tanner Nelson specifically for farmers and their families and are available as a newsletter. Even if you're not currently feeling under any particular pressure, I think you'll find they're a good resource for the future.

The fact sheets, which are

mailed out one per month for 11 months, are available through county extension offices in Delaware. They're also available directly from: Dr. Patricia Tanner Nelson, Townsend Hall, University of Delaware, Newark, DE 19717-1303 (302-451-2538). Out-of-state subscribers are asked to pay \$5 to

cover handling costs. (Make checks payable to the University of Delaware.)

By the way, since I started writing this column, the date book has been rewritten, the truck has been repaired and I feel a lot better. Now if I can only get that accountant moving.

Upjohn Offers Report On Feedlot Heifers

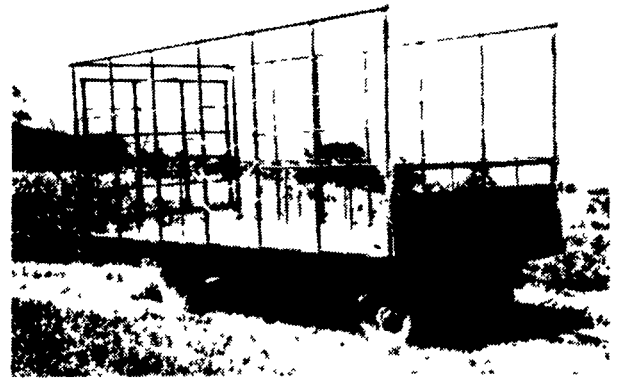
KALAMAZOO, Mich. — "Feeding open, intact heifers can be equally or even more profitable than finishing steers," a feedlot owner says in a beef management report now available from The Upjohn Company.

The report also features the packer's point of view on slaughtering pregnant heifers. "It's very hard for a packer to buy a bred heifer cheap enough!" says

the executive vice president of a large packing company. He goes on to explain what the decrease in percent yield and carcass quality of pregnant heifers compared with open heifers means in terms of lost dollars per hundredweight.

For a copy of this report write: Beef Heifer Management Report #1, TUCO, Division of The Upjohn Company, P.O. Box 5087, Kalamazoo, MI 49001-5087.

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