

Bull Behavior Is All In The Handling, Says PCA President

ANDY ANDREWS

Lancaster Farming Staff
MCKNIGHTSTOWN (Adams Co.) — "It's all in how you treat 'em. If you start beating on 'em, forget it."

Ray Grimes, president of the Pennsylvania Cattlemen's Association (PCA), said that he enjoys working on his Charolais cattle, as part of his 125 brood cow/calf operation. As he places specially prepared feed on the ground for the heifers, he calls them, gently, and ruffles their fine white coats, and says, "Nice girl, nice girl."

Grimes works with his 3,000-pound bull, a "puppy," according to Ray's wife, Mary. The bull was paraded last Saturday at the seventeenth annual Adams County Beef Producers Association Beef Ball during the famous Parade of Bulls at the New Oxford Social Club Pavilion in New Oxford. The bull, one of 12 breeds presented, is nicknamed "Max" from Rainbow Maximillian, obtained from Dave Douglas' Rainbow Farms in Martha's Vineyard, Mass. Max was paraded at the ball by 14-year-old Donna Classen.

With the bull, Grimes knows its best to take the gentle approach. But those sentiments toward handling any kind of cattle, particularly beef cattle, are the result of experience. "It's how you treat them, it's how their behavior is. If you treat them rough, they're going to be rough on you."

Care is crucial

Grimes serves his second term as Council president, said that bulls, who are more intelligent he said "than half a dozen cows," explained that care in treating the animals is crucial. Bulls, he said, remember mistreatment.

More importantly, mistreatment of animals before the auction can result in decreased sales and generally bad news for the beef industry in general, which has been recently blamed for deaths from e. coli contamination to increased causes of cancer.

"It pays for use to treat our animals right," he said. "If you don't, you don't make any money."

South Mountain Farm

Ray and wife Mary operate South Mountain Farm just off of the Old Rt. 30 northwest of Gettysburg. Ray purchased the farm from his brother Don in 1969. The purchase included 154 acres (120 tillable), but Ray rents additional ground to make about 300 acres of hay. He grows about 20 acres of corn and some oats, enough to feed the heifers and young stock. They raise the feed to mix with protein in the supplement, which often also contains some apple pumice (a waste product in making apple juice) for energy.

Ray and Mary maintain about 125 brood cows. Their operation consists of 80 percent purebred Charolais and about 20 percent commercial.

Ray chose the Charolais cattle because, he said, "they just appealed to me." At the time, the industry was looking for size, and the breed is noted for its large frame and leanness of meat. He obtained seedstock from various producers, including Linden Farms, New York (dispersal sale); Dave Douglas, Martha's Vineyard, Mass; Stonedale Farms, Ohio; Leroy Meyers, Maryland; and Royal Charolais, Greensburg.

"They're big," he said. "Now, the trend seems to be going to the

smaller carcasses.

"They're a beautiful cow as far as I'm concerned," said Ray. However, he said, "they're hard to keep clean. It shows."

"They make a good crossbred animal," said Mary. "They cross with other English breeds."

Ray said he enjoys working with the Charolais breed because they don't finish out until they're through growing — compared to other breeds, which can get fat while they grow.

He said he hasn't had too much trouble with the disposition of the cattle. "They got a name of having a wild disposition," he said, but that depends on how you treat them.

"I've raised Angus too, and as far as I'm concerned, they have a better temperament than Angus."

In the beginning, when Charolais were used because of their size, many traits, such as hard calving, were not corrected. But that is now becoming history, as the calving ease improves.

Taking aim

The PCA, with annual dues of \$12 per member, is associated with the National Cattlemen's Association (NCA), of which members pay \$60 in annual dues. The Association, with a budget of \$36,000, is taking aim at problems beef producers face. Their goal is to help disseminate information to allow them to produce better beef at a lower cost, and to keep the entire industry, and those who are members, abreast of the latest producer information.

They work closely with the Pennsylvania Beef Council, based in Harrisburg, to help producers survive in a world where many consumers are continuously growing leary of eating beef. "We try to learn with other people how to raise meat, and the Beef Council tries to tell people to eat meat," said Ray.

But through the Council efforts, as the result of the beef checkoff funds generated through sales of beef, the picture is changing. Slowly but surely more doctors and dieticians are recognizing the importance of beef in a balanced diet.

"It's not as bad as it used to be," said Grimes, who emphasized the vital need for the checkoff dollars. "We've gotten the word through to them that beef is still one of the best foods there is and also the safest."

Depend on checkoff

But the money from PCA comes mostly from the members. They also depend on the checkoff to help promote beef — and they need heavier weapons considering the growing strength of the animal rights groups, which continue to make their presence known.

At the recent NCA convention in Phoenix, Ariz., animal rights activists arrived there the first day of the convention "and they were promptly arrested for trespassing," said Ray.

The PCA is concerned, mainly because the rightists are well-organized and well-funded, and are making headway into the backyards of several producers. They will inevitably open fire on Pennsylvania cattle producers, too.

"It's going to come," said Mary. She said rightists began at some of the larger industry conventions in the Midwest because there, "they could get more publicity and more bang for their buck."

(Turn to Page B15)



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