
Teaching a Senior-Level Beef Cattle Science Course Utilizing Strategically Placed, Humorous "Tid-Bits" of Information

F. A. Thrift

Abstract

A microcomputer generated "textbook," capable of being updated and specific components distributed to students on a weekly basis, was developed as an aid in teaching a senior-level Beef Cattle Science course. As with any written source of information, the problem becomes one of getting students to read the Beef Cattle Science "textbook" material. To enhance student interest in reading the Beef Cattle Science "textbook," each major section of the "textbook" is supplemented with strategically placed, humorous "tid-bits" of information. Student response to utilization of the humorous "tid-bits" of information in the Beef Cattle Science "textbook" has been favorable.

Introduction

Choosing a current, up-to-date textbook for a senior-level production course, such as Beef Cattle Science, is often a problem since segments of most textbooks quickly become outdated. Even if a current, up-to-date textbook is available, getting students to read all, or for that matter, specific components of the textbook is often difficult.

Dealing With The Problem

Since a current, up-to-date Beef Cattle Science textbook was not considered available, a microcomputer generated "textbook," capable of being updated and specific components distributed to students on a weekly basis, was developed as an aid in teaching a senior-level Beef Cattle Science course within the Department of Animal Sciences at the University of Kentucky. As previously alluded to, the problem still is one of getting students to read the Beef Cattle Science "textbook" material. One possibility that forces students to read the material involves utilization of homework assignments whereby students have to read and analyze the "textbook" material to fulfill the assignment.

Another possibility directed towards enhancing student interest in reading the Beef Cattle Science "textbook" involves supplementing sections of the "textbook" with strategically

placed, humorous "tid-bits" of information that relate to a specific subject. Components of the Beef Cattle Science "textbook" are as follows: 1) Facilities, 2) Identification, 3) Industry (Global, National, State), 4) Breed Evaluation, 5) Nutrition, 6) Reproduction, 7) Genetics, 8) Health, 9) Marketing, 10) Management Practices-Calving to Breeding, Breeding to Weaning, Weaning to Calving, 11) Industry Problems/Possibilities 12) Industry Organizations, 13) Production Economics and 14) Taxation.

Where utilized for each of the above identified components of the Beef Cattle Science "textbook," the humorous "tid-bits" of information vary in length and may appear anywhere in each section of the "textbook". The following humorous "tid-bits" of information, which relate to a specific component of the course, are representative of the manner in which this technique is utilized throughout the "textbook":

1. Management Practices-Calving to Breeding

For spring-calving herds, adequate feeding of the cow herd 60 days prior and 80 days after calving is essential if an acceptable level of production is to be sustained. When the winter feed level is inadequate for the cow herd, many producers frequently find themselves faced with the dilemma described by the following "tid-bit": **As the winter lingers on and the cows begin to look thin and hollow-eyed, this is a sure sign the cows need something they aren't getting—namely feed! Time to visit the banker and explain that the pasture could easily be confused for a concrete driveway and it appears that a little supplemental hay feeding is going to be required to get the cows through the winter. When the banker asks why hay wasn't purchased during the summer, when availability and price were more favorable, respond that the cows didn't need hay in the summer.**

2. Genetics

Production of beef cattle composites by crossing breeds that compliment each other for specific traits is currently a topic of interest in the beef cattle industry. In terms of time and expense, development of a specific beef cattle composite represents a major undertaking and rationale for embarking on this endeavor should be well thought out. The following "tid-bit," adapted from a article by Rod Fee, Livestock Editor, Successful Farming magazine, relates to this concept: **Mr. Beef Producer decided to develop a "GREEN CATTLE COMPOSITE," reasoning that cattle producers would make the**

Thrift is a professor of Animal Sciences, Department of Animal Sciences, University of Kentucky, Lexington 40546-0215

connection—"GREEN GRASS," "GREEN COWS," "GREEN MONEY!" Mr. Beef Producer knew yellow and blue made green and "reasoned" that by crossing his Blonde d'Aquitaine (yellow) cows with a blue-roan, Belgian Blue bull, a "GREEN CATTLE COMPOSITE" should result. Apparently, Mr. Beef Producer's "reasoning" was slightly flawed since the resulting "COMPOSITES" could easily be mistaken for a group of grass-grazing rainbows.

3. Taxation

Due either to a lack of knowledge or fear of making mistakes, the average beef cattle producer is content to let an accountant deal with the many ramifications associated with filing an annual income tax return. The following "tid-bit" illustrates the potential consequence of making mistakes when filing a return: **An income tax return is like a girdle—if you put the wrong figure into it, you might get pinched!**

4. Problems/Possibilities

One current problem confronting the beef cattle industry involves the public's perception of specific terminology utilized by the industry. Proposed suggestions for changes in current terminology utilized by the industry are as follows: Slaughter Process, Stockyards Livestock Market, Doctoring Cattle Providing Health Care, Fat Cattle Finished Cattle, Drugs/Hormones Animal Health Products. The following "tid-bits," adapted from suggestions proposed by Baxter Black, Cowboy Poet, address this beef cattle industry terminology problem: **FAT STEERS Entirely out! No slur shall be made about their weight or their sexual predicament. Each cattle buyer will now deal in Ready Edibles. No, that won't work either. How 'bout Ripened Ruminants? GOMER BULL Of course, any allusion to sex must be eliminated. The term Gomer really has no meaning but leaves one with the impression that he's one brick shy of a load. He shall hereinafter be christened the Frustrated Titillator. No, that won't work either. How 'bout A Misguided Chromosome Depositor?**

5. Production Economics

Most beef cattle producers attempt to develop a good working relationship with their banker; however, this may be difficult especially when dealing with a banker that is some-

what reluctant to approve a loan based primarily on collateral involving only ones' "good word and character". To be successful when dealing with bankers, certain procedures should be followed as alluded to by the following "tid-bit": **There is an art to approaching a reluctant banker when financial assistance is needed—few beef cattle producers possess this gift. For most bankers, first impressions mean a lot so dress appropriate—wear a white shirt with your brand monogrammed on the sleeves—get a pair of expensive boots that are made of some exotic material such as antelope or frog skin; "Blue Light Specials" are a definite No-No! To properly impress the banker, go out and wade through the cowpen before you come in for your designated appointment. Logically, the "cowpen aroma" should put the banker in the right frame of mind—at least it will have a tendency to speed up the yes or no answer! Get a pocketful of expensive cigars—be confident; call the banker by first name and explain that you want to expand your operation and need extra capital. Now take your feet off the banker's desk, pull out your gold-plated pen, which you rented for the occasion, and get ready to sign on the dotted line. Offer the banker one of the expensive cigars only if you feel the negotiations are beginning to drag and the banker makes a casual comment about recommending you to a competitor! Note! The casual comment about recommending you to a competitor should be ignored since it is well known that bankers frequently attempt to amuse some of their more loyal customers with a dry sense of humor.**

Assessment

Student response to utilization of the strategically placed, humorous "tid-bits" of information in specific sections of the Beef Cattle Science "textbook" has been favorable. Previously, Thrift (1974, 1994) alluded to the merits of utilizing humor in teaching undergraduate Animal Science courses.

References

- Thrift, F. A. 1974. Illustrating animal breeding concepts with humor. *J. Animal Sci.* 38:236. (Abstract).
- Thrift, F. A. 1994. Utilizing humor and the microcomputer to teach income tax concepts in a senior-level beef cattle science course. *NACTA Journal* XXXVIII, No.4 :31.