Along with the joy of working with cattle everyday, many producers also take pride in getting local youth involved with livestock. An experienced beef producer can provide children help in selecting a quality animal for a beef project, and work with them on feeding, care, and showing techniques. You can also assist families by offering your animals at reasonable prices. Many cattle producers have arrangements with youth who do not have adequate facilities to adopt a calf or heifer. This involves the youth coming to the farm everyday to feed, break, and practice showing the animal.

Through livestock projects, youth learn life lessons and build valuable skills that help them throughout their lifetime. While caring for an animal youth learn responsibility, patience, and compassion for animals. Youth livestock shows have always been a vital part of our livestock industries. Showing cattle helps develop youth’s interest in animal agriculture and helps them become better community citizens. The experience also helps to build the beef industry because these youth become advocates for agricultural issues.

Beef cattle shows provide important networking opportunities for young people to meet successful cattle industry leaders and make friends all over the country. Youth and their parents involved in cattle shows find their experiences extremely rewarding. The youth are able to learn the business and record keeping skills necessary to run a beef enterprise at an early age. Many of the older children learn leadership skills by showing the younger children how to properly fit and show beef animals.

4-H provides a great opportunity for youth to show projects not only with beef cattle, but also for turkeys, chickens, rabbits, pigs, and goats. Youth receive their 4-H animals during the springtime. Workshops are given throughout the year so participants may learn feeding techniques, proper medicine injections, and grooming the animals before the show. Parent involvement is key to a successful animal science project. Younger children who show small animals such as goats and sheep progress to show cattle when they are older and better able to control a larger animal.

Youth also get the opportunity to win premiums, trophies, and ribbons for showmanship, project record books, and exhibiting. The premium money can be saved for college tuition and there are many scholarship opportunities available to livestock showmen. The prizes serve as a bonus for children for all their hard work. However, nothing can compare to the (Continued on page 3)
After the introduction of Continental breeds of cattle into the United States during the 1960s and 1970s, beef cattle producers began using these breeds in cross breeding programs to improve the performance of British cattle, such as Angus and Hereford cattle. When some of these Continental cattle, such as Simmental and Gelbvieh, were bred to black-hided British breeds, a congenital disorder began to show up in the offspring. This disorder is a form of congenital hypotrichosis, commonly referred to as "rat-tail" syndrome. This disorder causes a dilution of the dominant black hair color with a gray or charcoal calf with short, curly, malformed, sometimes sparse hair and the lack of normal tail switch development. The Senepol breed also normally shows these characteristics with a very thin hair coat and lack of hair on the tail shaft and switch.

The “rat-tail” syndrome not only has a negative affect on the hair coat but also on animal performance as well. “Rat-tail” calves have lower average daily gains during winter months from weaning to yearling, which results in a lighter animal at slaughter and are often discriminated against at market time, both resulting in an economic loss. At the feeder calf sales at the Stanly County Livestock Market these calves are penned in the “OX” pen and there is an average loss of $17 per hundred weight compared to the black cattle. This discount is also common and often more at the weekly livestock auctions.

“Kansas State University and USDA researchers studied a group of spring-born calves identical in background and management, some of which were rat-tail. There was essentially no difference in birth or weaning weight. But rat-tail calves gained 0.22 lb/day less from weaning to 12-months of age, 0.24 lb/day less from 12 months to slaughter at about 16 months, and were 79 lb lighter at slaughter, though they were fed for 13 more days. So some price discount may be justified, though not as much as is often seen.”

Crossbreeding programs and taking advantage of hybrid vigor for commercial beef cattle producers is a time proven way to add extra pounds to cattle and should still be implemented by producers selling cattle by the pound. With new information available from Continental breed associations it is now easier for producers to avoid having calves with the “rat-tail” syndrome. For example, the Gelbvieh breed uses the terminology “diluter” for animals that possibly produce rat-tail genetics and using a bull that is “diluter free” greatly reduces the possibility. The Simmental breed similarly uses the term “non diluter”. Females carrying the “rat-tail” characteristics should also be heavily scrutinized against for replacement heifers, as their performance will be affected as well as their future offspring.

“Rat-tail” genetics have been around for some time but the cattle industry is just now realizing the economic impact it has on individual producers and the beef cattle industry as a whole.

1Inheritance of the “Rat-Tail” Syndrome and Its Effect on Calf Performance
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Photo courtesy of Steve Lemons, Extension Agent, NC CE - Stanly County Center
With calf weaning season and regular spring/summer processing in front of us, it is a good time to evaluate how we handle our animals. Handling cattle today should be nothing like you did it 15-20 years ago. We need to take time to understand what we are doing and how animals may react to it.

First, we have to understand the concept of an animal's flight zone and use it to our advantage. What is a flight zone? It is the distance around an animal required by that animal for separation from any threat (human or otherwise). How big is an individual animal's flight zone? Well it as big as that threat (human or otherwise). How big is that approached ½ mile. Obviously both of those create issues with being able to effectively and safely handle an animal. You must factor that into any handling plan and how your catch pens and handling facilities are built.

Animal handlers must use an animal's natural flight zone to be more effective and safe in moving that animal around. That means understanding that the speed with which the handler moves into the flight zone and the distance moved into the zone will determine the animal's reaction. The take home message is that animals typically move better in response to slow steady movements rather than hurried, fast movements.

Second, understand that cattle are prey animals. Their genetic code was selected for moving away from threats to their lives. That means they do not like to move downhill in a chute and they move away from anything over their backs. So, chutes should be designed to be as flat as possible or only slightly uphill. Elevated walks on the sides of chutes can help put handlers in a position over the animals, which will generally help them move. As prey animals cattle also do not like to move into confined spaces when they are threatened and have the choice of more open areas. Pens and chutes should be designed to funnel cattle into more confined spaces, not to abruptly move from large open areas to small areas.

Third, beef cattle have their eyes on the sides of their heads (as most other prey animals). That tends to give them a more panoramic view of their world. However, it does limit two things. First, as a result they have very poor depth perception. That means any shadow or dark area on the ground looks like a hole to them. Therefore, we should look at our chutes and handling pens and try to remove any of those areas. Second, cattle cannot see directly behind themselves. As a result they typically turn to see what is going on behind them. Handlers should understand that and always work off to the side of a beef animal if the goal is to keep them moving forward.

A fourth issue to consider in handling cattle is lighting. That means artificial as well as natural lighting. Cattle do not like to walk directly to a bright light. That can be a light bulb or even the sun. Again as a prey animal they do not like anything that blinds them or limits their view. Bright lights directly in front of them will do that. A chute pointed directly east is hard to process cattle thru early in the morning because of that.

Loud noises during handling are a fifth issue to consider when trying to process cattle. Noises limit an animal's ability to hear what else is going on and startles them. While that might get them moving, it adds to their over-all discomfort and tension. The less tension and discomfort we can create for them during processing the better off the cattle will be and according to research the more profitable they will be for us.

Getting Youth Involved with Livestock - - (Continued from Page 1)
2008 Norwood Area Feeder Calf Sale Schedule

July 17
July 24 - BQA Sale
August 21
September 4
September 11 - BQA Sale
September 25
October 23

Remember
Consignments are Required!
Call 704.983.3987

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