Being an Activist for Animal Agriculture

Lance R. Miller

The heart and soul of the Western Lifestyle is rooted in agriculture, especially animal agriculture. As individual involved with animal agriculture, youth livestock exhibitors need to be activists for their industry. Youth livestock projects are excellent opportunities to shine a positive light on agriculture, livestock production, healthy eating options, and life development all at the same time.

Even if you do not seek to be an active voice for animal agriculture, you need to be prepared to discuss the positives of our industry if or when you are sought out by the media, concerned consumer, or active opponent of livestock production. When you exhibit livestock, you become a highly visible participant in the livestock industry. By do so, you can be asked to share your opinion and inform individuals who are under-informed or incorrectly informed about our industry.

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How Conformation Affects the Usefulness of Your Horse

Amy Mclean, PhD.

When purchasing a horse, it’s fair to say that most buyers would want to purchase a horse breed to do the event of their choice. For example if you are interested in horse racing then you would tend to purchase a Thoroughbred or Quarter Horse (that’s specifically “race bred”) or if you are into cattle events then you may purchase a horse that has bloodlines that include award winning cutting horses. How a horse is built or made can affect how well the horse can perform its job at hand. If you are interested in cutting then choosing a tall, lanky horse like a Thoroughbred may not be the wisest decision. It’s not to say other breeds of horses cannot excel or perform in events they may not have been bred for but one should take into account the physical demand of the event.

How much strain that is physically placed on a horse’s limbs including the joints, soft tissue, long and short bones will depend on the demands of the event. Performance is often compromised when horses experience pain associated with their job. Dabareiner et al., 2005 found that horses used for roping have an increase in lameness in their front limbs especially the right (26/74) and hind end lameness was more prevalent in heel horses (3/44 compared to 0/44 head horses). This was especially true for horses used for heading versus heeling. When you think about the amount of pressure and torque placed on the front limbs of a rope horse as it makes the corner with the steer this makes sense that injuries may occur in the front limbs (refer to Figure 1) and then you think of how a heel horse performs his job (refer to Figure 2). So, considering each job a horse performs in either English or Western Disciplines there will always be some risks or pressure placed on the horse’s body.

When purchasing or breeding horses an owner or buyer one should consider evaluating the overall balance and structural correctness of the horse. Balance refers to how the horse fits or is put together when divided into thirds. Each third of the horse from the poll to wither, wither to the top of the hip and the length of the hip should ideally be equal in length. We can also evaluate balance by looking for a trapezoid. When looking at the angle of the horse’s shoulder, length of its back, angle of its hip and the length of the underline one should be able to picture a trapezoid. The angle of the horse’s shoulder and hip are indicative of how that horse will move or perform its job. A horse expected to run long distances will have a longer more laid back shoulder so the front limb can reach forward with ease and cover the ground. The hind end of such horse will also have a long sloping angle so the hind limbs of the horse can reach forward and propel the horse forward.

Figure 1. The head horse in team roping is more susceptible to developing lameness on the front right compared to the heel horse according to research from Texas A&M University (Dabareiner et al., 2005).

Figure 2. The heel horse is more susceptible to injuries in the hind limbs and navicular (Dabareiner et al., 2005).
How Conformation Affects the Usefulness of Your Horse.

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When comparing balance and overall conformation to a horse used for pleasure or jumping again one will see major differences in how the horse is built (refer to Figure 3, 4 and 5). So, when purchasing or breeding consider the job of the horse and what areas of the horse’s body may be at risk for potential injury and consider if that horse is built for the specific horse. If breeding, consider breeding to a stallion that can enhance that area or strengthen it so performance is not compromised or lost due to injury incurred by poor balance and conformation.

**Figure 3.** Notice the Thoroughbred has a long and laid back shoulder and a long hip.

**Figure 4.** The above photos show a horse that would be used for western performance events like pleasure or trail. Notice the angle of the shoulder and shorter hip when compared to the Thoroughbred.

**Figure 5.** Another example of a different in the angle in the shoulder and hip angle for a horse used for over fence classes or jumping.
Talking Points

Scott Lake

Not Using Productivity-Enhancing Technologies to Raise Cattle has Unintended Consequences

Farm & Ranch Guide

The Journal of Animal Science has published new research looking at the consequences if U.S. farmers and ranchers no longer used productivity-enhancing technologies to raise beef cattle.

The remainder of the article can be found at:


Reduce Long-Term Impacts of Drought on Your Herd’s Reproductive Rate by Larry Stalcup

Beef Magazine

After a drought year everyone wants to forget, processing time can help cow-calf producers evaluate the mature weights and body condition scores of cows to help avert long-term damage to a good breeding program, says a leading beef cattle specialist at Kansas State University.

The remainder of the article can be found at:

http://beefmagazine.com/prevention-works/reduce-long-term-impacts-drought-your-herd-s-reproductive-rate

Eyes on Efficiency by Kindra Gordon

Angus Journal

In a quest to cope with the higher feed costs facing the current cattle industry, efficiency is top of mind for producers, feeders and researchers. In North Dakota, two studies are under way to gain more knowledge — and possibly propagate better genetics — for the cattle efficiency equation.

The remainder of the article can be found at:

Demand for Grass-Fed Beef is Growing by Georgia Gustin

Los Angeles Times

Troy Ellis has high expectations from his cow herd. Over the years, he has consistently weaned better than a 90% calf crop per cow bred, and steer calves have averaged 550 pounds at weaning.

The remainder of the article can be found at:

Being an Activist for Animal Agriculture

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Here are some great resources to help educate youth about being a positive activist for animal agriculture:

http://www.gotmilk.com/
http://www.animalagriculture.org/index.html
http://www.agclassroom.org/
http://www3.ag.purdue.edu/counties/boone/Documents/Youth%20livestock%20exhibitors%20as%20animal%20ambassadors%2015-257-W.pdf

We can all be a positive activist for humane livestock production, educated nutritional choices and how meat, poultry, fish, and dairy products can all be incorporated into a healthy diet, and positive stewards of the environment. To be able to do this, we need to be educated about our industry.