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Greener Pastures

Doug Warnock



The palate's role in human diets

By DOUG WARNOCK
For the Capital Press

I recently wrote about how livestock can make decisions that fill their personal nutritional needs through a flavor-feedback response system that comes to them naturally.

Their ability to do this depends on having access to feed that is diverse with many different types of plants. It becomes much more difficult to do this when plant or food diversity is limited. It is essentially impossible when grazing on mono-cultural pastures, or in confined feeding areas. Information on this comes from Fred Provenza, Department of Wildland Resources at Utah State University, and his associates.

Provenza is known worldwide for his studies on animal behavior and his coaching of livestock managers in using their knowledge of animal behavior to guide their grazing decisions. He and associates have learned much over the last four decades about how animals make food selections that meet their dietary needs and keep them healthy and productive. He shows how livestock palates link them to their familiar landscapes through these flavor-feedback associations.

Humans also develop likings for foods through flavor-feedback associations. The taste and texture of the food and positive consequences from food consumption lead to an acquired liking for the flavor of the food. These associations are influenced by the novelty of food, the amount of nutrients in the food and the individual's need for a particular nutrient in the food.

"Given a choice, neither herbivores nor humans eat only one food in a meal. Rather, they often eat meals in courses. They eat foods that vary in kinds and concentrations of primary and secondary compounds. Humans also add herbs and spices," Provenza says. "Over the centuries, humans have gone from being hunter-gatherers to industrial size farmers and food manufacturers."

As this change occurred, agribusiness and food manufacturing corporations became essential to the survival of large populations. But, as that happened, we lost many of the economic, ecological and cultural links to the landscapes that sustain us. These revolutionary changes over time have greatly reduced diversity in the fruit and vegetables that are available to formulate human diets.

The technologies that promote large-scale production and processing of human foods have reduced its phytochemical richness by 5-40 percent, depending on the crop and the prevailing production practices. Consumer concerns about food quality and production methods have led to an increased demand for organic and for more "naturally produced" foods. It is important to note that farming practices that focus on improving soil health can increase phytochemical richness of fruit and vegetables and reduce risks from pesticides.

"Our ancestor's palates were linked with the landscapes they inhabited through the hunting of animals and the gathering and growing of plants. An attuned palate enabled them to meet needs for nutrients and self-medicate. While most people no longer hunt or gather and few people are involved with agriculture, we can still eat nutritious varieties of wholesome foods grown on fertile soils. We can also grow gardens, a modest act that can profoundly affect health and well-being by linking people with soil and plants."

So, both livestock and humans benefit from their flavor-feedback systems to balance their diets and enhance their well-being and productivity when they have access to diverse and nutritious foods.

Doug Warnock, retired from Washington State University Extension, lives on a ranch in the Touchet River Valley where he writes about and teaches grazing management. He can be contacted at dwarnockgreenerpastures@gmail.com.

Large feedlot numbers tempered by light weights

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

USDA's latest cattle on feed report showing placements into feedlots in November were up a whopping 14 percent over last year's numbers surprised analysts.

But the report is not as bearish as the headlines would suggest, said Derrell Peel, extension livestock marketing specialist with Oklahoma State University.

"In almost every case, the surprise came from feedlots placing a lot more lightweight cattle," he told Capital Press.

Those lightweight placements are heavily centered in Texas, and that likely carried over into Oklahoma — although the report doesn't detail Oklahoma placement weights, he said.

Total placements in Texas were up 23 percent in November year over year, with



Capital Press File

Cows at a feedlot in Eastern Washington. There will be fewer feeder cattle available in the first quarter of 2018, as feedlots have moved lighter cattle into the system earlier than usual.

placements of cattle under 600 pounds up 71 percent, the National Agricultural Statistics Service reported.

That's reflective of poor pasture conditions and feedlots having an incentive to feed cattle, Peel said.

Cost of gain in feedlots is favorable, and wheat pasture in the Southern Plains is in bad shape. Pastures are dry, and now it's cold and wheat is going into dormancy, he said.

"Feedlots just went ahead and really loaded up on

calves," he said.

That helped push placements to 2.1 million, 256,000 more than November 2016.

But that's only half of the story. The other half is that the large number of cattle put into feedlots now means they won't be available later, he said. "The first quarter of 2018, there will be less cattle available for placement because we pulled them ahead."

Larger placements don't mean there are any more cattle around than everyone was already aware of. Feedlots can't create cattle supply — a point he stresses, he said.

"There are only so many cattle out there. All feedlots can do is time the placements; they can't control overall animal numbers," he said.

Because so much of the increased placements were light cattle, with a lot under 600 pounds, most of those placed in November won't come out

until May, he said.

That will keep fed markets from getting bunched up, unless feedlots place heavy cattle on top of the lighter weight cattle, he said.

Another thing to consider is with so many calves moving into feedlots in Texas — where it's dry, dusty and cold — is whether feedlots are going to be dealing with a lot of health issues, he said.

And because cattle placed at lighter weights finish lighter, those lightweight placements should continue to temper carcass weights and beef production, he said.

Peel expects beef production to be up 3.7 to 3.8 percent in 2017, followed by a 4.5 percent increase in 2018.

Fortunately, demand has continued strong. Retail prices are equal to a year ago, wholesale prices are holding up, boxed beef prices are back up and exports are up, he said.

Low-stress handling more effective than conventional stockmanship

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

JEROME, Idaho — Fourth-generation Montana rancher Whit Hibbard worked livestock for nearly 40 years before he was introduced to low-stress handling.

It took him that long to understand the way he had handled livestock had a cost. And he was slow to put that together because he never got a bill for the losses incurred from bad handling, he told ranchers at his stockmanship school sponsored by University of Idaho Extension.

It finally dawned on him the operation was "leaving money on the ground" through shrink caused by improper handling, and it sent him looking for answers. He found them at a stockmanship clinic developed by Bud Williams, a maverick in low-stress livestock handling. Williams' methods and principles were simple — but



Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press

Whit Hibbard, left, who promotes low-stress livestock handling, talks with Wayne Lehto, cow boss at Camas Creek Ranch, after Hibbard's stockmanship workshop in Jerome, Idaho, on Dec. 19.

they were also eye-opening and impressively effective, and Hibbard became a convert.

"I drank the Kool-Aid," he said.

What it all came down to was conventional stockmanship's failure to communicate with animals, he said.

With Williams' techniques, there's no need for hollering or cattle prods. It's better for the animals, the handlers, the operation and

the bottom line, he said.

Calmer is better

"The best way to be efficient is handling cattle so they're calm," he said.

Handling affects cattle performance in weight gain, conception rates, immune function, carcass quality and milk production, he said.

"We all know the profit margin in our industry is so thin. We need to do all we can to take advantage of any im-

provement," he said.

"Low stress is faster and more cost effective. We get generally more work done in much less time with fewer people and less stress on animals and us, and we enjoy it," he said.

Low-stress handling also mitigates the safety risks for animals and humans and has a positive impact on public perception, employee turnover, a ranching family's quality of life and whether the next generation wants to stay on the ranch, he said.

"In our conventional days, handling cattle was anything but fun. It got to a point where I didn't want to ranch anymore because cattle handling was so stressful. Now it's a fun place to work because we enjoy working on cattle," he said.

Low-stress handling offers a different and better way. Even a modest understanding of the principles and techniques can bring profound changes, both to the bottom

line and quality of life, he said.

"It doesn't cost anything; it's just a change of mindset and behavior," he said.

No chaos

Hibbard's videos contrasting low-stress handling with conventional handling are vastly different.

The videos of conventional handling are action-packed, adrenalized, full of commotion and chaos, loud and anxiety-ridden. Numerous handlers are yelling, waving hands and flags, wielding prods, cracking whips and using brute strength to force distressed cattle to move. Cattle are reacting dangerously, and near wrecks are rampant.

The videos of low-stress handling are calm and quiet, smooth and effective, with cattle responding willingly to the low-key movement of one or two silent handlers.

The techniques work, and they're really effective, Hibbard said.

Cheese ends 2017 on a positive note

By LEE MIELKE
For the Capital Press

The final CME prices of 2017 saw the Cheddar blocks at \$1.54 per pound, up 4 3/4-cents on the shortened Christmas holiday week but 12 cents below a year ago, with 13 cars sold.

The barrels finished the week and the year at \$1.4425 per pound, up 3 1/4-cents on the week, 15 3/4-cents below a year ago, and at a larger than normal 9 3/4-discount to the blocks. Twenty-three cars of barrel traded hands last week at the CME.

The blocks peaked for the year at \$1.76 per pound on Oct. 6 and compares to the 2016 peak at \$1.9425 on Nov. 9. They saw a 2017 low of \$1.36 per pound on March 15 and that compares to a low of \$1.27 on May 12, 2016.

Dairy Markets
Lee Mielke



The barrels ranged from a high of \$1.76 on Aug. 21, 2017, to a low of \$1.3375 on June 20, 2017. They got as high as \$1.88 on Aug. 5, 2016 and sank to \$1.27 per pound on May 12, 2016. They set a record spread of 22 1/2-cents above the blocks on Dec. 12 and set a record single day volume of 36 cars sold on Dec. 11.

The markets were closed New Year's Day but Tuesday saw a penny and a half come off both the blocks and the barrels as traders awaited Thursday's November Dairy Products report. That put the blocks at \$1.5250 and the barrels at \$1.4275 per pound.

Milk into Midwestern cheese vats remains plentiful, according to Dairy Market News, with spot milk prices reportedly ranging \$4 to \$8 under Class III.

Western cheese inventories are reportedly heavy. Cheese demand has been stable but not enough to stay ahead of the abundant milk supplies and vigorous cheese production.

Cash butter saw a Friday close at \$2.2075 per pound, up 2 3/4-cents on the week but 6 cents below a year ago, with only 3 cars exchanging hands on the week.

Butter had many thinking it would top \$3 per pound in

2017 but \$2.7375 was as high as it got, on Aug. 3, 2017. It fell to a low of \$2.0625 on April 18, 2017, but its 2016 low was \$1.7550 on Oct. 19 and it only got as high as \$2.3675 on June 17, 2016.

Butter held Tuesday at \$2.2075.

Central butter makers report that holiday cream supplies were plentiful and will remain so until early January. Some butter producers report that retail demand has been meeting expectations, while others suggest 2017 holiday retail figures were below previous years.

Western butter makers report that they are being

flooded with cream, butter production is active, and a few manufacturers are adding extra shifts or running additional churns to keep up.

CME Grade A nonfat dry milk closed the week and the year at 67 3/4-cents per pound, up 1 1/4-cents on the week but 34 1/4-cents below a year ago, with 13 cars finding new homes on the week at the CME.

The powder set a record low of 64 3/4-cents per pound on Dec. 19, 2017. The high for the year was \$1.0375 on Jan. 18. The 2016 low was at 69 cents per pound on April 6, with the peak at \$1.05 on Dec. 22, 2016.




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