

Hoveland writes final article

CARL HOVELAND

These monthly articles have been written for the Georgia Cattleman since 1992 to provide information on timely topics and new research on pastures and hay that might be helpful to cattle producers. During much of this time, our university had no forage Extension specialist, so it is hoped that the articles were useful.

I generally enjoyed writing them, although they took quite a bit of time, and at times, it was hard to choose a good topic. Sometimes, I felt like Stephen Leacock, who said, "Writing is not hard. Just get paper and pencil, sit down and write it as it occurs to you. The writing is easy - it's the occurring that's hard."

I am blessed with having a job that I love: teaching students and doing forage research at the university. Many cattle producers love what they do and can agree with Art Buck, "Fun is when you enjoy what you're doing; work is when you'd rather be doing something else."

In addition to teaching and research, I have enjoyed getting to meet many Georgia Cattleman readers at cattlemen's meetings, forage-training sessions and other Extension events. You have been a wonderful group of people to work with over the years. But people age just like pickup trucks and tractors. Gray hair is a sign of age but not necessarily wisdom. There comes a time for new blood with young, vigorous, enthusiastic people to take over. Starting next month, the forage articles in the Georgia Cattleman will be written by Dr. John Andrae, forage Extension specialist based at Griffin, Ga.

Later in the spring, Dr. Robert Morgan, forage Extension specialist based at Tifton, Ga., will be joining the program. Georgia cattle producers are very fortunate to have attracted these outstanding young men who will serve you well. As for me, I will continue teaching until retirement sounds better than full-time work.

Change

In my 46 years as a forage agronomist, there have been many changes. However, some things seem to stay the same. The problems of government and solutions offered by politicians seem to stay the

same. "The budget should be balanced, the Treasury should be trefilled, public debt should be reduced, the arrogance of officialdom should be tempered and controlled, and the assistance to foreign lands should be curtailed lest Rome become bankrupt." This was written by Cicero about the Roman Empire in 63 B.C. but seems remarkably modern. Government deficits, politicians promising quick solutions to long-term problems, and government bureaucracies continue to irritate people.

When it comes to change, most people resist it, particularly as they get older. We like the comfort of familiar things. It gives us a feeling of security. It is much easier to try and keep doing things as one has always done. For instance, some people refuse to learn anything about operating a computer, something that children quickly learn and use as a toy. Change is painful for many people but is critical if one is to succeed in any business today.

Successful cattle producers

It has been interesting to observe differences between successful and less successful beef cattle producers. With many producers, complaints about the cattle price, drought, poor grass or clover stands, sick cows, poor calf crop, or army worms dominate their conversation and indicate that not much is going well on their farms. Others are optimists and seem to overcome these problems and market cattle at a profit.

1. Successful cattle producers use information that is available. They use their county Extension agents, attend training short courses, read widely and ask questions before spending money on any new technology or variety. If a new practice looks good to them, they try it out on a small scale and may adapt it to fit their own farm if it pays.

2. They are innovators and utilize new technology before their neighbors do. In doing so, they take more risk, but they also have the potential for more profit.

3. They plan ahead in regard to ordering supplies, repairing equipment and carrying out various farm operations, trying to avoid crisis management and last-minute decision making. They keep

good farm records, have objectives and know where they want to go. As baseball star Yogi Berra said, "If you don't know where you're going, when you get there you'll be lost."

4. They get things done on time when they need to be done. This is especially important for planting when moisture and soil conditions are favorable to get good stands. Timely harvesting can make a big difference in hay quality.

5. They don't buy on the basis of advertisements claiming that a new grass or other product gives unbelievably high yields or animal gains. Most of the time, these claims are not substantiated in university trials. The trouble with so many of these advertisements is that they contain half truths that turn out to be a lie. There are a surprising number of people who fall for these wild claims and waste their money when they could be buying a good product.

6. They avoid getting deep in debt for toys such as big, new tractors and other equipment that has little potential for payback. Smart producers often buy used or repossessed equipment, keep it in good repair and under cover, making it last a long time. It is well to remember the words of Henry David Thoreau, "A man is rich in proportion to the number of things which he can afford to let alone." These are strange words in our culture where we are bombarded with advertising telling us that buying particular products will give us happiness.

Final comments

I enjoy visiting old cemeteries and reading epitaphs on gravestones. Some in England are especially interesting and sometimes humorous. There are two that I especially like. The stone of John Price, who died in ~~1856~~ 1763, reads simply, "Praises on tombs are trifles vainly spent, a man's good name is his own monument." Edward Bawn, buried in ~~1856~~ 1796, is honored as "an honest man and a good neighbor."

I trust that in our association over the past eight years in the Georgia Cattleman that I have been "an honest man and a good neighbor."

Carl Hoveland is a Terrell Distinguished Professor for the University of Georgia.