

West Alabama Purebred Beef Cattle Shortcourse

"Building Blocks to Success"

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I would like to start this shortcourse with reading you some scripture from Proverbs 27:23-25. Know well the condition of your flocks and pay attention to your herds, for riches are not forever. In Proverbs 27:2 it says Let another praise you and not your own mouth; therefore I will not be heeding the words of the wise man.

The title of Dr. Gimenez and my part on your shortcourse is "Building Blocks to Success." When I was in the Army at Ft. Sill, Oklahoma, I attended a course to be a Gunnery Instructor. They emphasized the importance of convincing your students you are an authority on the subject to get their attention. I realize there are a lot of people here tonight that know a lot more about this subject than I do. I would like to discuss my vision on cattle breeding after 40 years of trial and error and on the job training.

What are your goals and what are you trying to accomplish? I was lucky in my beginning that my vision was to sell bulls to the commercial cattleman. It never dawned on me that the purebred person would buy bulls and females from me; therefore I culled my herd for twenty years before selling any bulls and females to the purebred breeders.

As a purebred breeder what are we trying to accomplish? Let's list a few things to start this discussion.

1. A calf with size and shape to be born alive.
2. To wean a calf within what goal you seek - 500#, 600#,700# or whatever.
3. For that calf to have the ability to go on grass or feedlot and gain rapidly in an efficient manner.
4. To grade choice and have a carcass in the 650# - 850# range.
5. To make money for all segments of the cattle business.

The show ring is an important tool in training young people responsibility, building character, confidence, and leadership. It is my belief that it is the greatest deterrent in the breeding of a functional, profitable herd of cattle. The biggest mistake a breeder can make is to always be using the National Champion Bull. He will change every year and there will be a new one before you get calves on the ground. In my forty years of breeding had I followed show ring I would have gone from dwarfs to giants. Cattlemen ask me often what frame cattle I like. We have not put any emphasis on size. Our selection process has been what performs in our environment. Performing includes breeding back on time, calving ease, with a growth calf possessing adequate muscle. That sounds like a commercial but nowhere in the process did we measure frame or select for a certain phenotype.

This brings us to the breeding of cattle. I look at breeding cattle as flying an airplane. We referred to the safe operation of an airplane as staying in the envelope. If you get outside the envelope and get too slow, you stalled and crashed. If you get outside the envelope and get too fast you caused structural failure and crashed. There are many things from center of gravity, RPM, ceiling limit, that makes it mandatory you stay in the envelope.

We also have an envelope in the breeding of cattle. The first thing that comes to mind is size and shape of calf at birth. Knowing the birth and growth have a positive correlation. If you are selecting for any one trait like growth, your birth will get outside the envelope and you will crash. Likewise, if you select only for low birth weights, your growth may be unacceptable. In the Charolais breed as you add growth and muscle, milk drops off. They are correlated in a negative way.

In my herd we may have reached the upper limits in growth until we have a break through and develop a low birth weight bull with above our herd average on growth. At this time I have some charts to demonstrate how we make a decision on which cow to breed to a certain bull. As you can see if we need to lower birth or add growth or milk one bull doesn't fit all needs. Ideally all the cows would have the same EPD's and the selection process would be simple.

The most important part of all of this is keeping accurate records. It is most frequent I hear the comment, "My EPD's are not accurate and therefore I don't believe in EPD's". That is a reflection you have done a poor job of collecting and

reporting data. You must understand the necessity of whole herd reporting and reporting your data within the proper contemporary group. Sick calves have to be reported as sick and any calf with special treatment , good or bad, reported. I find it amazing that people will lie to themselves and over time believe it. The most abused data is birth weight. I know of a herd that all of their birth weights range from 79 - 81 pounds. I bought cows from them and had my heaviest calves out of those cows.

This is the book all of our records are kept in. In the first pages all new calves are recorded. Next we have a listing of all the cows and their dates to calve and put new breeding dates. Next by date we have all the cows listed in order of calving. The third section is open cows. All open cows are listed after pregnant exam so we can evaluate the reason. The fourth item is Date Bred. We keep a running list of cows bred, date and sire. Next we list the bulls, and then we list our heifers. Then I have a section to write notes. If you call, I will open the book and while we are talking, write the date, your name, why you are calling, and list your address and phone number if known.

This is an exciting world and business we are in. I wake up early in the morning waiting for daylight to weigh and tag a new born calf that will set new records or breed a cow that will produce the next great herd sire.

I realize these next couple of years will be tough times for many cattlemen, including me. It also offers some opportunities for us to get our herds in order to

profit when good times return. Only the top calves will return a profit. We must castrate the bottom end of our bull calves and sell at slaughter the marginal cows and calves. We need to do as most big corporations are doing now and that is downsizing and getting lean and mean. We never should have kept some of those bottom end cows and bulls. It is time to cut our losses early and plan for the future.