



# Advice for the young

(Only young cattle people should read this!)

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Most of my life spent in the cattle industry with stud and commercial cattle, and my experience in many different parts of the world has involved working with young people. They are amazing. Their skills, knowledge and enthusiasm continue to impress me. Many are exceptionally gifted and love what they do.

I would like to offer some advice to younger women and men starting out in the industry. Some experienced people may well disagree with much of what I have to say but this is not directed at them anyway. Read on if you are under 30 or young at heart.

1. There is a future in the cattle business. It may involve working for private enterprise, for government, for yourself and in many different areas of the industry: production, marketing, property management, livestock agency, banking, transport, processing, retail or food service. You may not have the benefit of having a family property to inherit. There are still lots of other options for you to find well-paying jobs with personal satisfaction for your efforts or to build a cattle business of your own.
2. Just have a go. If you enjoy working with cattle, with the wonderful people that do likewise, find yourself a job, an interest and get stuck into it. Most people have to earn their future; it will not be handed to you.
3. Get an education. Go to university if you are so inclined. If not, get a trade or do many of the short courses that are available. Learn how to learn and how to use technology. Most of you are very proficient on phones, tablets and games. There are lots of great internet sites that give training in how to understand and use products, information and resources.
4. Learn how to grow grass and how to utilise it. New Zealand farmers lead the world in this. Any grazing business starts and ends with grass. It is your raw material for making everything happen. Learn how to manage grazing systems, fertiliser, pasture species and cultivars. Learn how to assess pasture quality and volume, and how to supplement economically what is missing in the pasture available. Learn how cattle perform on different feeds and how to budget animal performance. Many New Zealand cattle are only allocated rough terrain and lower quality grazing so learn how to manage the cattle requirements with grass supply.
5. Get involved in livestock marketing. Follow cattle through an abattoir; learn how the payment systems work for carcase sales and how price discounts apply. The whole meat industry is going to make rapid changes in coming years. The New Zealand industry has little understanding of market specifications or how cattle values are decided. This needs to change. There is no future in producing a base commodity product. Indian

buffalo meat and Argentinean low cost beef can do it cheaper than we can. To stay viable, cattle breeders need to produce and market quality beef for consumers that are increasingly discriminating and demanding. Consumers will want more than just the meal they eat. They will want to know how it was produced, what it was fed and how it was handled. The processing industry will become more innovative with quality and yield grading systems finally introduced. They will do more value adding and more brands will develop to reflect differentiated product. Understand how to make the most of these changes and opportunities.

6. Learn what drives commercial returns from the cattle business. Breeding herd return is based on the number of animals sold and the return per animal. Fertility is the key and this is decided by management, herd health and genetics. The sale price is decided by how heavy the animals are and their value per kg. Each female must produce a live calf to weaning and the calves must grow quickly to meet market targets. Weaner buyers need calves that grow quickly and meet market specifications when they sell them. They will come back again if your weaners perform. An understanding of these relationships is extremely important for stud breeders supplying bulls to the commercial industry.
7. Stick to the knitting. Manage your herd for fertility. Get heifers well enough grown to join as yearlings. Join them to fit, young, active, light birth weight bulls for six weeks, or longer if you scan pregnancy and keep only the ones that conceive early. Grow out heifers to calving and monitor during calving. Assist when necessary to protect your investment in calves and heifers. Feed first calvers well after calving before re-joining. This is the most sensitive time of their productive lives. Those first calvers that get back in calf on their second joining and rear acceptable calves are the future of your herd. Give them every chance to succeed. You need to MANAGE this process, not simply observe it.
8. Genetic improvement is basic to all breeding activities. Selecting suitable bulls that will drive your progress in the next generation of calves and replacement heifers is fundamental. The bulls you introduce to your herd are what will drive genetic change. Learn how to use performance figures and to assess for structural soundness. The performance figures are important. They are not perfect, but they are an important tool you can use if you learn how. Let the older generation ignore them and pick holes in them if they want. EBVs and \$Indexes are too useful to ignore. Use them to make genetic change in your cattle, to improve those things that you want to improve and to make your next generation cattle more economically productive.
9. Make friends with positive people. Use their enthusiasm to keep you focused on the positives in life. Don't let negative attitudes or negative people drive you down. Have fun doing what you like to do.
10. Get involved with sporting, civic, cultural or hobby organisations. We all need to be involved with something more than work. Family will be a big time demand but get some sort of interest for you like horse sports, dog training, fishing, sport or showing cattle. Learn not to get too disappointed when the All Blacks lose. They have won their fair share. The world will not end. We Aussies know that, from bitter experience! ■