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Board Commentary

by Rita McPhee, District 1 Director - West

The Many Hats of a Red Angus Producer

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. I often have this image of my father wearing his cowboy hat. It was not just any hat, it was his going to town hat. It was beige felt and had a very distinct shape to it, the cattleman's shape. I had never thought of my dad as a cowboy, he was a cattleman. When he wore that hat he was very distinguished looking and welcoming. In fact, when you think about it, we as beef producers wear many hats. Some hats fit better and are more comfortable than others.

I often wear the hat of a veterinarian. I am constantly faced with what vaccination schedule to use or which vaccines to use for my area. With new products out daily, we must keep educated and up to date on the health concerns for our cattle. It is a constant learning process, and even trial by error as to what products work best for our individual situation. I am also faced with wearing the AI technician hat. We must be able to manage getting the cows bred. If our cows don't get bred then we do not have a product to sell. That would lead me to the hat of the investment banker. We need to make the best decision on which bulls to breed to. We must evaluate our herd and see where the necessary changes need to be made or tweaked some. I must invest in what pedigrees or performance will enhance my current program. These are not quick returns, so much care and thought should be taken with these decisions. It is important not to chase the latest fad or high dollar pedigree; but thoroughly evaluate our needs and our customers' needs, since this is an investment in future calf crops.

The hat I seem to wear the most is employee. As an employee, I must be able to take orders from my boss, who usually is myself. Freedom of being

your own boss is good, but now this can be a double edged sword. I do have the freedom of being my own boss, but I don't have anybody to blame but myself when things go wrong. I constantly was taught to close every gate I went through behind me. I even preach this to my kids these days. On occasion, the cows mysteriously get out, usually because I thought I was coming right back through, but ended up going out of the pasture through another gate. See, no one to blame but myself, and I even had to round the cows back up since I was the employee too. I sure lost any freedom I may have had.

At times, I am wearing the PR hat. This is a hat that can be uncomfortable for me to wear sometimes. We must continually keep promoting our product and operation. Some find niche markets to go after and others stay steady and focused on the future. We all have many things we can bring to the forefront to promote our programs. The key is finding the one that works for you and your area. Sometimes when I am talking to customers they ask, "Why I should use your cattle?" I want to revert to my childhood and just say "because I said so". If it were only that simple. The educator hat is one that is worn from time to time. We must be able to inform our customers and others on the benefits of using Red Angus cattle. This can lead to loyalty and trust that our customers will have in our operations.

Whatever hat we might be wearing at any one particular time, it is important to take pride in the cattle we are raising. Do not get set or complaisant in your ways, but keep striving to produce a better product. With all the weight of the hats we have to wear, don't get bogged down, remember to enjoy being a part of the best breed in the industry - Red Angus. ■