

Cattle Business in Mississippi – January 2018

“Beef Production Strategies” article

Old McDonald Had a Farm

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2017 was full of new beginnings! In January, my wife Meghan and I had our world rocked by our first born son, Reason. Watching him grow, become mobile and (very) vocal were the highlights of my year. He has been so much fun. He loves to sing, dance, and learn new things. His favorite toys all include farm animals. We have probably went a little overboard on farm animal toys, but they're pretty abundant in the toy aisle at the big box stores. As I sat and watched him play the other day with a singing Holstein cow, I thought how these toys are some children's only connection to agriculture. They know the sounds animals make, how to recognize the type of animal, but they don't know what they produce. I think it is important for our industry's longevity to invest in the education of our youth.

“Humanizing” food animals is one thing, I think we should all be aware of. From cartoons and movies to comic strips and books animals have been granted the ability to talk and do human activities for quite some time. Thanks to the animation, I think that even children can distinguish the fake from real. When animation is used to promote an agenda, I think we really need to be ready to defend our industry. For example, Disney has used the slogan “Fish are Friends, not Food” from their Finding Nemo/Dory movies. From the context of the movie, the quote was from a couple of sharks who had pledged to give up fish in their diets. While we all know this is illogical in nature, I wonder how many children could be influenced by this propaganda. It will be interesting to see if the new movie Ferdinand will have an underlying message – I sure hope not.

I struggle on my stance of naming my real animals. I will admit, I have a few cows in my pasture with names. Some have human names with others have descriptive names that describe their personalities. All of our hearts were warmed after reading the stories about Oatmeal, the blind steer from Texas, and J.D. the Angus steer that belonged to Alec Gotto of Iowa (www.youtube.com/watch?v=a2-ufpzCU6I). There was a huge contingency of people who wanted to “save” these animals. You see when animals became humanized to the public, emotions became linked to them. In Oatmeal's case, animal rights groups became involved and Oatmeal's life was spared. There was even a “Save Oatmeal the Steer” Facebook page that had a significant number of likes!

As we start the New Year, I challenge you to think about the emotional connections that consumers have to agriculture. The love for animals usually starts at a young age with Old McDonald's Farm and animal toys. As these children grow up, I think it is important they know where their food comes from and respect and value the farmers who produce it. I hope you all have the best 2018!

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