

## **Thankful for More than Cattle**

Andrew P. Griffith

Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics

The University of Tennessee

This article will be reaching most mailboxes shortly after Thanksgiving, which means many readers will already be gearing up for Christmas and other holiday gatherings. However, it is always appropriate to give thanks for the blessings and gifts in our lives as well as looking for the good things in even the worst situations. As our nation continues to work through coronavirus, the effects of the pandemic, social unrest, and a contentious election season, we as livestock producers and farmers have much to be thankful for.

The first thing we can be thankful for is the fact that we were the first group of people to practice social distancing. Farmers and ranchers have been practicing social distancing for a couple hundred years in this country. We stay on our farms and work the land with limited contact to other people in many instances. It is impossible to social distance in every aspect of life, but at least most of us have some acreage where we can get out and not have to worry about coming into contact with a large group of people. Social distancing is not just for a pandemic, but it may also be an advantage during the time of social unrest and an election season that proved this country is a house divided as it relates to politics.

There is no doubt many of the circumstances the past year have been difficult, disheartening, and simply sad for many people. However, these circumstances offered opportunities that would not have been available otherwise. From a personal standpoint, coronavirus has provided me the opportunity to spend more time with my family as well as on the farm, all of which I am thankful for.

Anyone who knows me in the slightest knows I have a passion for production agriculture including cattle and crops. This is very evident in that I enjoy the work associated with agriculture, and 95 percent of my conversations come back to cattle and crops. This little fact may wear my wife out, because she has to listen to me talk about farming even in my sleep. My daughter does not care about my talking. She just wants to go check on the cows. However, I still have a captive audience in my son, because he still has less than a five-word vocabulary that does not include “no” or “stop” and I can still walk faster than he can run. Thus, I am thankful for my family, the farm, and the opportunities the farm offers with the family.

Many readers are probably beginning to wonder if I am ever going to get to a point in this article. The answer is yes, and here it is. Cattle market prices have left a sour taste in the mouths of most cattle producers this year. There have been some small windows where there was a glimmer of hope as prices of certain classes of cattle improved, but it was often short lived. One has to be thankful for these small windows of opportunity. One also has to be thankful for the times when cattle prices can be considered fair to good. It often takes tough times for people to recognize how good the other times are. Thus, be thankful for the times that are not tough, because they are actually good. Secondly, be thankful for the tough times, because they build character.

The second point of this article is to those who are skeptics of what was just read. There are sure to be some who will say that cattle prices have been poor since the record prices of 2014, 2015, and much of 2016. If that is the case, then I might suggest to that person that they reevaluate the business they are in. If prices have been poor for four consecutive years in a person’s opinion then that person should take a serious look at their business model and determine if they should remain in the business. There is no reason to put in labor and management to an operation that is not returning any value. Additionally, quitting a business that is not profitable does not tarnish one’s reputation. Continuing in a losing proposition is what tarnishes a reputation and drains the bank account.

It is always right and good to be thankful. There is never a bad time to be thankful for the blessings and gifts in one's life. Actually, being thankful will increase the joy in a person's life and provide that much more reason to continue pressing forward to improve oneself and those around them.