



Herd Quitter...

At first glance, the term “herd quitter” seems to have a negative connotation. No one wants to be a quitter — but wait a minute... it depends on what you are quitting. For example, after chewing Copenhagen for twenty-three years, I quit in 1993. That was a good thing! There are things that we *should* quit. Therefore, being a quitter is not always bad.

I use the term “herd quitter” to refer to people who have enough courage to break away from the status-quo, herd-mentality way of thinking. Following the crowd and doing what everyone else is doing is seldom the best way to manage your business. In fact, it may be the absolute worst way to manage your business. If you’re doing what everyone else is doing, you will never have a competitive advantage. If you don’t have a competitive advantage, it will be very difficult for you to compete — especially when the economy takes a downturn.

Consider, if you will, a herd of cows. Cows, for the most part, are social animals. They like to be a part of a herd. It gives them a sense of comfort and security that they don’t have when they are alone. When cows move, they almost always move as a herd — whether they are being pushed or moving on their own. Once a herd has movement, it is very difficult to stop or turn. It develops a mind of its own. I refer to this as “herd mentality”. The only individual thinking that takes place is done by a few of the more wary animals who are always on the outside edges of the herd.

If the cowherd is headed toward hidden danger of some sort, there is very little chance that it can be averted. The entire herd will be in trouble before anyone knows it. The only ones that will be able to avoid the danger will be the individual thinkers on the outside edges of the herd. These are the herd quitters. Rather than follow the herd into danger, they will break away from the herd. The herd quitters, no doubt, will be chided by other herd members for leaving the herd and for taking a different path — but in the end, the rest of the herd will wish they had followed the herd quitters.

More and more ranchers are becoming herd quitters — and none too soon. They have quit following the conventional, status-quo herd of high-input, unsustainable agriculture. They have quit following outdated traditions. They have quit focusing their entire program on increasing weaning weights (and cow size). They believe that agriculture must be both profitable *and* enjoyable to be sustainable. They believe ranchers are in the business of converting free solar energy into a great-tasting, high-protein food product — and if properly done, the cow will do nearly all of the work for them. They believe ranching is a great way of life — and they are excited about the future!

Dare to be Different! Dare to be a herd-quitter! You can no longer afford to be a part of the outdated, status-quo beef industry. Even though the writing is on the wall and it isn’t that difficult to read and understand, most producers will not change until they are forced to change. Allan Nation, editor of the *Stockman GrassFarmer*, once told me, “Most people would rather fail conventionally than succeed unconventionally.” Sad... but true. Most people hate change. They are afraid to break away from the herd.

Perhaps someone needs to start a support group for Herd Quitters (Hi, I’m Kit — and I am a herd quitter). That way we will know that we are not alone. We will be able to encourage and support one another as we endeavor to replace old, outdated paradigms. Folks, as long as we know we are on the right path, it doesn’t matter what everyone else is saying and doing. So what if they criticize and poke fun at us? We need to maintain our focus on building a fun, profitable and sustainable model for beef production.

