

Jody Holthaus, Agent  
Meadowlark Extension District  
Livestock and Natural Resources

## Cattle Temperament

I read a story about a Kansas veterinarian that died as a result from injuries from a bull attack. A couple of elderly brothers in Iowa, ages 84 and 79 were killed by a bull. Their third brother discovered them, as he was returning home from the hospital, from injuries he suffered by the same bull, five days earlier.

For the most part our industry, sends ill-tempered animals to slaughter. The problem is, sometimes the most docile animals can get agitated. More efforts are being made to select for calm animals including EPD's for docility. Researchers are finding ways to measure excitable behavior in a manner safe for the animal and handler. But not all problem animals display obvious signs before a bad incidence. That is why we need to be reminded, especially during calving season, don't take animals for granted. Even if we spend a lot of time with them, something could happen in our absence that can get them agitated.

Quite a few years ago, I had a close encounter with a male bovine. We were chasing a bull in from the neighbors pasture. My job was to stand in the gateway, so the bull could see where to turn in (a.k.a. target). He saw me alright, mistook me for a rodeo clown. I did a pretty fast sprint and leap. Unfortunately, the neighbor saw this and talked. At the next track meet I attended, it was suggested I enter the hurdles! He always enjoyed teasing me about that experience.

Nutritional status largely determines reproductive performance in cattle; so excitable temperament may indirectly impair reproduction in beef heifers and cows by decreasing nutritional balance. Also, the hormones produced during a stress response, particularly cortisol, directly disrupt the physiological mechanisms that regulate reproduction in beef females, such as ovulation, conception, and establishment of pregnancy. As an example, cows with calm temperament have reduced cortisol and greater blood concentrations of luteinizing hormone, the hormone required for puberty establishment and ovulation, compared to temperamental cows.

Accordingly, it was recently demonstrated that beef heifers with calm temperament reached puberty sooner than temperamental cohorts.

Further, beef cows with excitable temperament had decreased chances of becoming pregnant during the breeding season compared with their calmer cohorts. Similar relationships were detected when blood cortisol concentrations were evaluated against puberty or pregnancy instead of temperament in those heifers and cows

Therefore, excitable temperament has detrimental effects on the reproduction of beef females, which are likely mediated by elevated cortisol concentrations