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### **Calm Cattle Pay**

218K... This might seem like a random number, but every cattleman starting a new group of heifers, likely has a similar number. She's the one heifer that is just a tic more nervous, first to jump up, holds her head a bit higher and makes poor choices when working the group in open pens or working facilities. Everyone has a different tolerance level for excitability in cattle, my threshold is low, to the point of almost too docile. But how do you measure temperament?

Research shows calmer cows have higher levels of milk production, which translates into more pounds of calf weaned. Meanwhile, calves with calmer temperaments exhibit a better response to vaccination at weaning, tend to exhibit better growth performance and body composition, are quieter and calmer in the feedlot during handling and have higher average daily gains than cattle with more excitable temperaments. Calmer cattle also save on wear and tear on facilities, equipment and personnel.

Research has also determined temperament to be a moderately heritable trait. Meaning, producers can have measurable impact on this trait through selection in subsequent generations. There are a few questions to be asked, accompanied by measured/observed data, if you truly do want to make herd temperament adjustments. As a manager ask yourself the following:

- Do I select breeding animals with good temperament, not just cull those with bad ones?
- Are records of cows culled for temperament tracked and daughters carefully watched?
- When selecting replacements do I make my first cut with more than needed and make a second cut with a more critical eye for structural issues and temperament?
- Could my program benefit from an objective scoring system that I could use internally for selection decisions? Then use this data to promote the docility within my program?

The Beef Improvement Federation provides the following scores and definitions for uniformly evaluating temperament and disposition in cattle. Recommended scoring times are at weaning and/or yearling age, but this can be done anytime animals are processed through a chute. Personally, I'm always making mental notes, in addition to written scores, looking for the 218K's of the world. Take a look at your herd's disposition and remember calmness pays!

**Score 1 - Docile** Gentle and easily handled. Stands and moves slowly during processing. Undisturbed, settled, somewhat dull. Does not pull on headgate in chute. Exits chute calmly.

**Score 2 - Restless** Quieter than average, but may be stubborn during processing. May try to back out of chute or pull back on headgate. Some flicking of tail. Exits chute promptly.

**Score 3 - Nervous** Typical temperament is manageable, but nervous and impatient. A moderate amount of struggling, movement and tail flicking. Repeated pushing and pulling on headgate. Exits chute briskly.

**Score 4 - Flighty** Jumpy and out of control, quivers and struggles violently. May bellow and froth at the mouth. Continuous tail flicking. Defecates and urinates during processing. Frantically runs fence line and may jump when penned individually. Exhibits long flight distance and exits chute wildly.

**Score 5 - Aggressive** Similar to Score 4, but with added aggressive behavior, fearfulness, extreme agitation, and continuous movement which may include jumping and bellowing while in chute. Exits chute frantically and may exhibit attack behavior when handled alone.

**Score 6 - Very Aggressive** Extremely aggressive temperament. Thrashes about or attacks wildly when confined in small, tight places. Pronounced attack behavior.