

THOUGHTS FOR DIGESTION

By: ©Bob Jackson, Tall Grass Bison
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- 21st century bison ranching – breaking ‘em down until they are totally dependent on us - the antithesis of allowing Bison a will to live.
- Sterility is not passed on genetically, so one has to believe the need for fertility testing is the result of human management problems.
- Humans are a very ineffective predator. We aren’t even good parasites. A smart parasite keeps his host alive and a good predator makes sure his prey remains viable and healthy. Humans are heading on a patterned course of making their food non renewable – chickens that can’t walk and cows unable to survive in their own environment.
- If, as caretakers, humans are to determine when Bison die we also have to assume the burden and responsibility of understanding how he lives. Otherwise we need to acknowledge we are a sub-standard specie.
- Can holistic be just that, a hole in the soul, when we don’t include in its advocacy, Bison’s will to live?
- Maybe, just maybe, throughout the ages, Bison did not live for us but in spite of us.
- If we believe Bison were placed on this earth for our food and clothing, then they sure had to endure long periods of time in our absences suffering without a purpose in life.
- Smithfield, the world’s #1 hog producer and in control of millions of genetically controlled animals, justified its need to buy out IBP, the #3 meat packer, by saying in today’s world market it had to have a more uniform and consistent product. My question is, “If huge corporations aren’t satisfied, how can we in a fledging Bison industry ever, or even want, to compete in obtaining the eventual square block of living meat product?” Maybe our niche is in finding ways to market and utilize distinctly non-consistent animals. It seems the Indian was very successful in eating this way, and if we as white men can’t successfully promote this American animal for American people, then---you fill in the rest.

- Every one in the Bison industry knows and extols how Bison cows have nurseries in which one cow will watch a bunch of newborns while the other mothers graze. Does anyone really think thousands of years of specie development have limited social development to this one stage of life? Do we think for ever after it's just a simple life of grazing grass?
- Raising Bison with family and social order doesn't have to be that scary. It simply can be thought of as raising them Texas style. Instead of rating and showing individuals Bison could be judged by comparing families. Rather than selling singular animals at the sale barn we bring in the whole group. Breeding bulls could be judged and priced according to their upbringing within social order bull groups. It's all just bigger, you see.
- Goliath bulls or cows found in the wild would be as much a freak show as a stunted dwarf. They are aberrations of nature. Any physical changes made by species have to be made in small increments in order for that specie to survive. To be sure, nature itself selects for size. But it has checks and balances that bring individuals back into herd conformity. If this doesn't happen quickly, populations usually end up with disastrous results to all. Thus, vigor and vitality are always most important in genetic selection.
- When, we as producers, break down Bison social order, and at the same time make them totally dependent on us, we effectively break down their will to live. Thus, we have to provide costly inputs – labor and food. We end up weaning so the cow will have enough energy to produce next year's calf. It doesn't have to be this way. If we didn't take their mothers away the calves would have the support group, their older brothers, sisters, aunts and grandmothers. We also end up paying the cost of nutrient flushing because the juvenile bulls can't provide the rock concert stirrings for pre-estrus cows.

We eliminated the breeding bulls, the 6-8 year olds, because of upkeep cost, so those pre-estrus cows now have no protection from those same juvenile bulls. There is no orderly procession with excitement being replaced by action. We take out the lead cows and move in juvenile transplants that end up running all over the place. Their search for stability (and home) means overgrazing areas close to where they were let out of trailers. We put up fences to get "efficient" grazing without realizing family groups' interaction causes intensive grazing in diverse areas (all we have to do is look at the psychology of two cows at the big bale. Everyone knows it's not long before a cow goes around to the other side and

makes the second cow move---to the dominant cow's former position. Texas style means multiple groups keep moving to new areas).

- We worry about all kinds of replacement bulls, when in family groups, bulls and cows think about the same as we think – yuck, when someone says something about kissing a brother or sister.
- Bison behavior was not shaped by humans. We were, at best, incidental predators (wolves were with them all the time) maybe that are why we have all those historical accounts and present misconceptions of Buffalo being stupid, stoic animals. Bison defense was to fortify. If wolves got them to run, then Bison were vulnerable. (Ever seen a lone Buffalo stand in the middle of the corral and not want to move? This is their final defense against wolves.)
- I parallel the Bison industry to one where the company is already in place with equipment, buildings, secretaries, management, salesmen, etc., and then another owner comes along who only sees liquidation value in those same assets.
- As long as we view Bison as a commodity, we will always have problems with arguing for more than liquidation value, whether it's meat or live animals.
- The buyer (consumer) has to identify with the product, and the owners have to know how their company operates before they can “advertise” their product to its consumers.
- Buffalo already know how to maintain infrastructure of their “company”. We -
1.) Don't have the respect to acknowledge this, 2.) Don't know how to maintain this “company”, and 3.) Don't understand how to capitalize on this fact when selling to the public.

I feel our public relations “division” is content with letting the buying public struggle with a sub conscience of why they really want to buy Buffalo meat. Inherently they know its “right” to buy Buffalo but we need to define for them what makes up “right”.

“Right”, of course, goes deeper than health, western history lore, and stuff like that. To me it has to do with words such as conviction, excitement, zest, roots, coming home, and purity. I see no better animal than Buffalo in conveying what it stands for---what we, as humans, need.