



Profiling Confinement Cattle Feeding Operations

In field sales management positions, we frequently experience the extent to which modern communications have limited our ability to actually interface in ear-to-ear conversation with technical personnel, deferring instead to voice or email to convey need for formulation assistance. Countless messages are received that contain only enough information to force several more voice or email encounters before the feeding program can be developed. Most of this is due to failing to get adequate information at the feedyard during the sales interview process. Use this technical bulletin as a checklist to sharpen your profiling skills in confinement cattle feeding situations.

An employment ad for a feedyard profiler might read something like this:

**HELP WANTED: PROFILER FOR
CONFINEMENT CATTLE FEEDING**

OPERATIONS. Will work with feedlot managers and farmer-feeders to develop feeding and management programs. Conversant in language of the growing-finishing industry is required. Must be able to divine answers to your questions regarding lot operation even when those answers are not readily apparent from what the manager has said. Personality must be such that your reappearing at the lot a second or third time or calling the manager several times in the evening to get additional information does not get you forbidden on the property. Must be able to convince owner or lot manager that a change in supplemental feed supplier can be done without disrupting his feeding system, but pending his growing comfort with your expertise, some feeding management changes may be recommended.

Selling Yourself

The first step is the most difficult. In the course of your initial meeting at the lot, find a way to present a brief summary of your beef cattle expertise and a menu of the services you can

provide. In the “services” section of your expertise leaflet, do not restrict your list only to services *you* know how to provide. Assume that whatever the lot needs from a service standpoint in order to gain their business is available somewhere in the Vigortone system. However, use judgment.

Generally, people are uncomfortable talking about their accomplishments, so you do not necessarily have to review your beef expertise with your prospect while you are there. You’re probably not the least bit apprehensive about handing your prospect a Vigortone product brochure. But if you give him both the product brochure and your summary of beef expertise and services, which one do you think he will read first, either before or after you leave? People are curious about other people.

Keep these concepts in mind. Which will provide the best first impression of Vigortone to your prospect – your product literature or you? (Answer: you.) Which will be the best resource from which your prospect can develop/improve his feeding and management programs – your product literature or you? (Answer: you.) Assuming that you get the lot’s business and retain it for a number of years, to what can you attribute the longevity of your relationship, the Vigortone product(s) he feeds or your knowledge of his operation and the industry and the services you bring? (Answer: initially, both, but over the long haul, almost entirely your knowledge and service.)

Remember that this expertise summary should be specific to beef. Your prospect feeds cattle because he likes cattle. Granted, he may have always wanted to own a Mercedes dealership but doesn’t do that because he doesn’t know how and doesn’t have the time to learn. He recognizes this and does not waste his time seeking out that type of

advice. Respect his busy schedule by understanding that from a business standpoint, he doesn't care how much you know about coaching your daughter's softball team. That's not to say, however, that over time you shouldn't cultivate that type of relationship.

Things You Might Say About Your Beef Expertise

- Formal education relative to the beef industry
- Years involvement in the cattle and feed industries
- Industry recognition for service, leadership
- Attendance at significant short courses
- Membership in local, state, and/or national beef organizations
- Participation in Vigortone's Feedlot Focus Group
- Personal ownership in beef cattle enterprises
- Consider "name dropping" of current customers, if safe

Feedlot Services You Might Provide

- Locating cattle, specializing in source- and process-verified cattle
- Feeding program formulation, profit projections, monitoring performance
- Monitoring ingredient quality, mixing efficiency, feeding management
- Sourcing alternative ingredients
- Screening emerging technologies
- Liaison for retained ownership arrangements
- Inspection of cattle and reporting to owners
- Identifying market opportunities for cattle
- Custom development of batching, inventory, and performance tracking software for smaller feedlots
- Assistance in promoting feedlot at trade and feeder meetings

Get The Manager Talking About His Cattle

Frequently, this happens without any prompting on your part. If the manager doesn't volunteer, start the conversation by asking any or all of these questions:

- Origin and how shrunk and/or stale they are on arrival
- Weigh-up location and conditions
- Previous feeding history, if known
- Type, sex, breeds, and colors

- Age, weight, weight variance, and weight relative to age
- Frame, muscle, and condition

Certainly agree to look at his cattle if he offers, or ask to do so when you think the time is right. Use this tour of the feedyard to further interview the manager for more detail resulting from the initial conversation about the kind of cattle he feeds.

Determine The Lot's Feeding Objectives (Benchmarking)

- In-weight, desired out-weight
- Expected rate of gain, feed conversion, and/or feed cost of gain
- Marketed as feeders or fed cattle
- Sold through sale barn, private treaty, fed on retained ownership, other

Ask the manager to narrow down any ranges he has provided regarding cattle weights and expected performance. Ask to see example closeouts, keeping in mind that he may show you a "Hollywood" sample.

Feedstuffs Analysis And Pricing

- Nutrient analysis reports, if available
- Are these applicable to current feedstuffs
- Costs for feedstuffs in use
- Are feedstuffs marked up and by how much
- Are feedstuffs shrunk and by how much
- Are any feedstuffs in limited supply

If current nutrient analysis reports are available but copies are not offered or cannot be made, ask if you may make notes of dry matter, crude protein, ADF, NEm, NEg, Ca, P, and K. Usually defer sampling and having your own analysis done until a feeding program can be presented to and approved by the lot manager.

Feeding Management

- Feeding management for receiving cattle
- Intake management as incoming cattle are brought up on feed
- How long on receiving ration
- How is receiving ration medicated
- Introduction and intake management of fermented roughages

- Transition onto growing or finishing rations
- Number of days on each transition
- Limitations of hired help doing feeding

Physical Form, Handling, And Mixing Of Ingredients

- Processing of grains and roughages
- Handling of incoming ingredients (bagged, bulk, or tote)
- Amount of purchased ingredients that can be received
- Unloading capabilities
- Any bagged ingredient to be added in even bag amounts
- Batching and mixing procedure
- Order of ingredient addition
- Need for batch sheets
- Physical form or mixing restrictions for any ingredient(s)

Ingredient And Additive Specifications

- Analysis of current supplement or premix
- Precise feeding rate
- In the TMR, supplement or premix added as percent of batch or amount/head
- Ionophore of preference
- Medications targeted by manager as amount/head/day
- Can urea be used
- Use of alternative ingredients
- Anything fed by hand or free-choice
- If free-choice, what is intake
- Other additive specifications

Summarize And Conclude The Call In This Order

- Propose to develop a feeding program and return later with recommendations.
- Avoid recommending a Vigortone product at this time.
- Ask to review your notes with the manager.
- Remind the manager of the services you can provide.
- Review the tech support available from Vigortone.
- Offer examples of breakeven worksheets or inspection reports.

Prematurely recommending a product will lead to a discussion on price when the possibility exists that a less costly alternative may be a better fit for his feeding program. Once a feeding program is developed, and if an improvement in feeding management or performance can be presented on the return call, price objection probably can be averted by demonstrating a competitive, maybe even better, cost of gain. Deferring a product recommendation until later identifies your intent to fully analyze your prospect's objectives and operational constraints as the feeding program is developed. Asking to review your notes will identify your commitment to accuracy and minimize the need to return or call back to get information you missed or misunderstood.

Reminding the manager that you are service driven may give you an opportunity to go over your beef expertise and service summary if you have not already done so. Exploit the use of Vigortone's technical staff, remembering to point out that we specialize in beef.

I like to leave hard copy of at least one aspect of the service menu the manager was given upon my introduction. With small- to medium-sized lots, the one that gets the most attention seems to be a breakeven program. In lots that do custom feeding, being willing to regularly inspect customer cattle and report their performance and well-being to their owner is seen by the lot manager as a service that will perpetuate return business and improve relations with first-time feeders who are already apprehensive about the care of their cattle in a lot located some distance away.

Key words: beef cattle expertise, feedlot services, feedlot management