

# The Cattle Business Really is a Family Business

Keynote Speech

Knox County Cattlemen's Association

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When I found out that I would going to talk here today, my first thought was "I need some cattle jokes!" So I did what anyone would do: I went to Facebook and Twitter, of course. Here are a few that were suggestions:

- "What do you call a cow after weaning?" De-calfinated.
- "There is a new phone app to help you count your cows. It is called a COWcultor."
- "Did you hear about the bomb going off at the dairy farm? It was UDDER destruction."

In all seriousness, I am thankful for the opportunity to speak here tonight. For those of you that don't know me, I grew up on a Simmental farm near Shelbyville, Illinois and I have advanced degrees in animal science. I have offices both in New York City and Champaign, Illinois; recently, I opened a third office in my hometown of Shelbyville. I joke that I am the only lawyer in the country who is also a Ruminant Nutritionist and I take pride that I might be one of the few people in the courthouse who know the difference between a Hereford and a Heifer.

When I reflect on my youth growing up in the beef cattle industry, I cannot help but think about Dr. Jerry Lipsey, the previous Executive Vice-President of the American Simmental Association. I interned briefly for the association out in Bozeman, Montana where I got to see him in action each day. He is on a short list of people who I admire most in the beef business (along with my father, Curt Rincker). My admiration for Dr. Lipsey wasn't because of his brilliance; instead, it was his profound understanding that the cattle business is really about people, and especially family.

I've always been intellectually curious the science production agriculture. Looking back, I enjoyed my graduate school experience writing my thesis on DNA gene markers and learning about how certain vitamins can encourage marbling disposition. I loved learned about the harvesting process during my undergraduate meat science class and learning new methods to help increase tenderness and palatability. I love every aspect of the beef business from parturition to plate, but what I love the most and perhaps what leaders like Dr. Lipsey deeply understand is that, at its core, the beef business is really a people business. What makes this industry great is it's families.

My fondest memories growing up having nothing to do with a ribbon or trophy won at the fair. It was getting up with my dad and brother at the crack of dawn to hit the wash rack on show day. It was knowing my grandparents would be there holding hands later that day and taking WAY too many pictures. It was my mother with her sole task at teasing the tail. It was time in the barn with my father watching him pull calves in the middle of the night or helping him give vaccinations. It was riding in the back of my dad's pick-up truck at sunset while he checked cows. It was the friendships I made playing Euchre on a showbox at the county fair or how great my grandmother's lemonade tastes after an afternoon of bailing hay. These are the memories that have shaped my life. It was those memories with families and friends who helped cultivate the professional I am today.

When people ask me what my key to success is, the answer is very simple: it is hard work, the kind that I learned growing up on my family's farm. I am forever thankful for that work ethic that is inherent in those involved in this great industry. I pray that agriculture will always be an industry that cultivates children who aren't afraid to roll up their sleeves and get dirty, both literally and figurative, as they will later enter into our communities and workforces leading by example. It is these values that have strengthened my love for beef and the people who produce it.

You didn't think you'd get a lawyer up here without some legal advice, did you? For what it's worth, here is my \$0.02:

- **Don't be afraid to talk about the hard stuff.** Have those uncomfortable conversations about money, management of the cattle operations and its transition to the next generation.
- **Don't put off succession, business and estate planning.** It is never a good time to do it, trust me, I know. But do it because you love the people you may leave behind.
- **Consider having written contracts, including farm leases,** even with family members as a mechanism to make sure everyone is on the same page and prevent disputes. Contracts do not mean you don't trust the other person; conversely, you simply aim to get a clarification of the terms of the agreement.
- **Think about using a trained mediator** as an alternative dispute resolution mechanism to help facilitate a conversation for a farm business dispute or disagreement regarding succession and estate planning.
- For those of you who aren't married yet, **prenuptial agreements should not be taboo.** Nobody gets on an airplane thinking it's going to crash but you still go over the safety instructions. Prenups can be kinda be romantic-- it's saying that no matter what happens in life, I want to make sure you're okay and this is the game plan so we don't have to spend a small fortune in litigation. I'm still waiting for some poor schmuck to get down on one knee and ask, "Baby, will you sign a prenu with me?" And then I will respond by saying, "of course, my dear, I get all the cows."

My slogan at Rincker Law is "food, farm and family." I figured that it capsulated both the dichotomy of my law practice with both food/agriculture law and family law -- and if people forget I like to tell them that I do both "horses and divorces". When I tell people that I have this hybrid practice I sometimes get strange looks but the two are intrinsically connected. One of the reasons why I am also passionate about family law is because I know how important strong families (no matter the shape) are to our communities, and the agriculture industry.

And I'm fairly certain that sediment rings true among other leaders in the beef business like Dr. Lipsey. Take a moment and look around this room full of cattlemen and women who are also husband and wives, grandparents, children, grandchildren, aunts and uncles, cousins and friends to other cattlemen and women. My challenge to you is to look around the room and take pride in the for the community that you have built here in the Knox County Beef Association but also be cognizant that the strength that you see tonight starts at home with you and your relationships with those closest to you.

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