

A Lucky Cow with a Surprise Calf

I raise and fatten about 100 beef animals each year. All are females, either heifers or cows depending on the end use. In general, females fatten better on a grass-only diet.

Most of the animals are young and intended for tender cuts.

Some are cows or older heifers that have failed to produce a calf. These animals are best for roasts and ground meat.

We work to provide a good life for our animals and a stress-free death. In order to eliminate stress at harvest time, I harvest the animals in the pasture when they are relaxed and calm.

I began the Fall Harvest this week.

Each week I select animals that are ready and that best satisfy customer needs.

Among the six animals selected for harvest this week was a Black Angus with ear tag "B68." This heifer, failed to produce a calf in the spring. Because of that, the Wisconsin farmer that raised her culled her from his herd. I bought her several months ago.

She was checked by a vet at that time and declared "open." "Open" means not carrying a calf. I very seldom buy pregnant animals.

B68 is large and in excellent condition. But probably a little too old for tender steaks. I had designated her for roasts and hamburger.

On harvest days, I transport two carcasses at a time to our processor, Quality Meats in Foley. Josh the butcher, is ready for my animals as I bring each load of two in.

I intended to take B68 on the first load but two other selected animals presented themselves. Those two went in on the first load.

I dispatched one animal for the second load and was about to do the same for B68. She was lying down, which was a little unusual. Contrary to what you may expect, when done correctly, the cattle are calm when harvested.

It does take some knowhow and preparation to achieve that.

B68 stood up slowly and turned broadside to me. I was ready but I waited a few more seconds for the perfect opportunity. I take care to dispatch each animal instantly with a single shot.

In my peripheral vision, I noticed a large mucus discharge from B68. That is not uncommon. There are 60 female beef animals in this herd. A healthy young bovine has an estrous cycle every 21 days. There are several animals in what farmers refer to as "heat" at all times.

I was ready but this was different. I hesitated a few more seconds.

I looked directly at the heifer's discharge and saw the tiny hoof of a calf.

She was giving birth!

I selected a different animal and hauled the second load of the day to Foley.

When I returned an hour later, I took these photos of the calf and cow.

The new calf is a heifer

Gail named her Lucky.

Calves born this late in the summer do not winter well without milk.

Because of that, Lucky extended B68's life until June 2017.

B68 will enjoy Fall, Winter and Spring with her new calf.

Perhaps both cow and calf should be named "Lucky."

Tom

