

NO COW LEFT BEHIND
PINE RIDGE EDUCATIONAL CONFERENCE
AUGUST 2007

Adapted by Joan Wink from:

Available at: www.joanwink.com/scheditems/nocow-adapted0907.pdf

Remsen, K. (2003, July 25). *No cow left behind*. Burlington Free Press, p. 11A.

This idea was originally written by Ken Remsen, a school principal from Vermont, and was based on farming and falling milk prices in 2003. I shared the original in *WinkWorld*, December, 2003, available at: www.joanwink.com/newletter/2003/news1203-prairie.html I know very little about farming, and milk prices certainly are no longer falling. Thus, I have adapted this to fit the context of ranching on the prairies in 2007. I shared this on The Pine Ridge Reservation in August 2007.

As a teacher-educator facing the task of understanding the effects of the No Child Left Behind legislation, I am well aware of what NCLB actually looks like/feels like in schools today. I also know that many believe testing students is the answer to bringing about improvements in student performance.

Since many assume that testing is a cornerstone to improving performance, I do not understand why this principle isn't applied to other businesses that are not performing up to expectations. I was thinking about the problem of ranchers' falling income and wondering why testing cows wouldn't be effective in bringing up profits since testing students is supposed to bring up test scores.

The federal government should mandate testing all cows every year starting at age 2. I know that it will take time out of the ranchers' necessary work to do this testing every year and that it may be necessary to spend inordinate amounts of money on the testing equipment, but that should not detract us from what must be done.

I'm sure there are plenty of statistics to show what good cattle performance looks like and the characteristics of cows which achieve this level of performance. It should, therefore, be easy to figure out the characteristics necessary to meet this standard. We will begin our testing by finding out which cows (a) exceed the standard; (b) meet the standard, (c) almost meet the standard, or (d) fail to meet the standard. Points will be assigned in each category, and it will be necessary to achieve a certain average score. If this score is not achieved, the Department of Agriculture will send in experts to give advice for improvement. If improvements do not occur over a couple of years, punitive measures will begin immediately. The state will take over your herd and your ranch, as they know more about ranching than ranchers.

I know that ranches have a mixture of cows in their herd because they believe in hybrid vigor, but it is important to remember that every cow must meet the same standard. The people in Washington DC will decide what the standard cow looks like. There should be no exceptions and no excuses: Black Baldies have to be just like Texas Longhorns; Herefords have to be just like Angus; Beefmasters have to be like Charolais. All Brown Swiss, Guernseys, and Holsteins must also measure up and be held accountable for producing good beef, even though their family cultural patterns have stressed only milk production. One-size-fits-all is our goal for all cows in the United States. All cows will be equal by 2014. In addition, our No Cow Left Behind will not make allowances for new cattle, which the rancher just bought at the sale barn; just because the previous rancher did not provide the proper nutrition or a proper environment, accountability must be maintained. All cows need to meet the same standard.

Another key factor will be the placement of a highly qualified rancher on each ranch. It doesn't matter that some ranchers just started and some have been doing it for many years, it will be necessary for all ranchers to become certified. It is irrelevant what they knew before or where they learned it, we now have new standards for ranching on the prairies. This will mean that they will need to begin taking classes after work at night and during their summers. There will be a bit more paperwork. In addition, each rancher must pass a new test, which we commissioned our knowledgeable friends to produce. However, in the end this will lead to the benefit of all.

It will also be necessary to allow choice for the cows. If cows are not meeting the standard on a certain ranch, they will be allowed to go to the ranch of their choice. Transportation may become an issue but it is critical that cows be allowed to leave their low performing ranches. This will force low performing ranchers to meet the standard or else they will simply go out of business. This is simply good business!

Some small ranches will probably go out of business as a result of this new legislation. Simply put, the cost per cow is too high. As taxpayers, we cannot be expected to foot the bill to subsidize ranches' low performing cows. Even though no one really knows what the ideal cost is to keep cows achieving, the legislature will set cost per cow. Expenditures too far above this cost will be penalized. Since everyone knows that there are economies of scale, small ranches will probably be forced to close, and those cows will merge into larger ranches.

Some will find that a few cows become so discouraged that they simply wander off and drop out. This is not a problem, as the remaining cows will bring up the test scores for the ranch. Also, some ranchers may also become too discouraged to stay in the business; this is an opportunity to bring in others who have studied with "us" and know our standards well.

Some ranchers may be upset that I proclaim to know what is best for these cows but I assure you that those people in DC have experience and expertise, as they all went to school, and they eat beef.

I hope you will consider this advice in the spirit it is given, and I hope you will agree that the NO COW LEFT BEHIND is not good for the ranching industry, nor ranchers, and it sure is not good for cows.

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