

Cattle sale succeeds in spite of COVID-19 distancing

By Ken Kellar
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Another cattle sale is in the books, and even though it was unusual thanks to COVID-19, it is being seen as a success.

"We were actually quite pleased with our weekend," said Rainy River Cattlemen's Association member Kim Jo Bliss.

"There's a lot of uncertainty in the industry right now with packing plants and stuff, so we were somewhat concerned because the effects of all that trickle down. We were a little bit nervous, because we want our producers to do well. But really we felt that we had a pretty decent sale. The truth is farmers always want more, that's just the way it is, but I think generally most people that we've talked to and heard from were actually quite pleased with the results."

The most recent sale took place this past Saturday, April 25, and while the old way of doing things had to be changed in light of COVID-19 prevention measures, Bliss said a good number of animals went through at decent prices.

"We had 1425 animals we sold," she said.

"The prices were okay. They were like what we're seeing in from the West a little bit. Usually it's higher in Southern Ontario, but it was very similar to

the West so they were decent. We're not setting records or anything like that, but considering..."

Bliss noted she and some of the other producers in the area had noted that a decent winter and spring had led to good quality animals for this sale, with average prices for some animals reaching \$245 per pound.

Of course, with physical distancing measures in place from the provincial government in an attempt to flatten the curve of COVID-19 spread, things had to be done differently for the sale, such as limiting those in attendance that day to buyers and staff, but Bliss said the community was largely understanding of the restrictions they implemented.

"Generally speaking everybody did respect it really well and so that was nice," said Bliss. "It's difficult, to be honest with you, because there are places in the process that you're working together. So it is hard, but we felt that we had a good weekend and we had somebody assigned to watch the door, and then she went every half an hour and disinfected the door handles."

As the cattle sale was deemed an essential business by the province, it is exempt from the number of people that can be working at a time, though the government and the Beef Farmers of Ontario still

recommended that every reasonable precaution be taken to limit interactions and observe best practices to stop the spread of COVID-19. Bliss noted that farmers in the area are lucky that they were deemed essential, and know that rules have to be followed to keep it that way.

"We're continuing on with our business, though somewhat difficult. If we don't follow the rules, we won't be there this fall and it's really important for our district, our farmers, to have that option in the fall. So we took it seriously. I think that we did a decent job. It was different, there's no doubt about it, but I think it went well."

While business has continued on mostly as normal, Bliss said that disruptions that do occur can sometimes come from unexpected places.

"There's been some disruption, but generally speaking it's business as usual," she explained.

"I think the challenge for all of us is calling ahead. Like calling to make sure we can pick up something, because we just generally go to town and get what we need and go home. I think there's some challenges with that, but the cattle and everything else continues on. They don't have a clue that the world has slowed down right now. So that part is good."

Bliss also noted that the Cattlemen's Association is expect-



ing to hear back soon in regards to funding for rebuilding parts of the sales barn that were damaged in a fire that occurred in Sept. 2019.

Overall, in spite of some difficulties due to the pandemic, Bliss said she's encouraged by the support for local farmers she's seen in the district.

"A lot of people are supporting local, looking for meat and stuff like that, and that is appreciated," she said.

"I hope if anything comes out of this situation, I really hope that we do appreciate all that we can produce, not just in Canada but right here in Rainy River. We are able to feed a lot of people with what we have in our own district, provided the abattoir stays running. I hope everybody stays safe, but I also hope that we learn from this as well."



Social distancing was in full practice for buyers during Saturday's cattle sale in Stratton. More than 1400 animals were auctioned off throughout the day. Another sale is scheduled to take place in fall.
-Ken Kellar Photos



Bees in the district had a rough winter, with reports of 75 per cent of hives being lost.

The latest buzz is trouble in the hive

By Jack Elliott
Rainy River correspondent

April 21st.

The bees should be buzzing, but with spring taking its own sweet time arriving, there has been little for the bees to buzz about. Normally by this time bees are busy collecting their first loads of pollen from the alders and pussy willows. This pollen is the protein source the bees need to feed their new larvae and produce a new generation of workers to carry out their major job of pollination as well as create that golden harvest we all know as honey.

When beekeepers took away the insulation from the wintering hives earlier this spring all was not as well as hoped. Colony collapse disorder which has been stalking the industry these last years is always a fear. Then what started with a bit of warm weather early in April turned downright cold, preventing the early bloom of alders that traditionally supplies that first flush of pollen for the bees. Continued cold, windy weather further prevented the bees from foraging at all. Veteran beekeeper Rick Neilson of Seven Bends Honey now keeps only about a dozen colonies of bees and was quite pleased with his colonies survival rates losing only one weak hive he had not expected to survive. He credits some of his bee's success to a new colony insulation method he uses. A 4-6" layer of shavings between a tarpaper wrap and two colonies stacked side by side seems to have been very successful this past winter. He noted the first signs of bees bringing in some pollen on

Varoa mites which parasitize honey bees, weakening the colony, has also been a problem over past years. But Neilson claims a new treatment - fumigating colonies with oxalic acid - appears to be a very successful treatment. Oxalic acid is the substance found naturally in rhubarb leaves that makes them noxious to humans, (and varoa mites) says Neilson.

Other District beekeepers have not been so fortunate with several reporting losses approaching 75 per cent of their overwintering colonies. Although some losses were expected, this was extreme. Beekeepers have limited choices on how to restock their apiaries. The quickest and simplest method is purchasing "nucs" which is a box containing frames, feed, worker bees, and a laying queen that is then placed in an empty colony. This "nuc" will quickly expand to take advantage of the spring nectar and pollen flow. But at over \$250 per "nuc" it is a significant investment.

The alternative is to split your existing colonies that are ready to swarm, dividing the brood and "requeening" the new hive. This is a process that takes time and a good deal of skill.

District beekeepers have a Facebook group. Search for Beekeeping Rainy River District. All the best to a local group of entrepreneurs as they not only struggle to keep their industry vibrant, but provide the pollinators for our food supply. The results will be sweet.

The frogs started singing on Friday so I guess it's time to start on this year's crop.

I went over to Lenard's and dragged my little rototiller out of his shed because my own is too cluttered up with my trike collection to store anything else. Besides Lenard likes using my little tiller. . . like the Littlest Bear's porridge bowl, it's just the right size.

Of course getting it out of the shed is easier said than done as Len's lawn tractor had the entrance blocked and it was deader than a doornail. If my old neighbor Beaner had been handy it would have been no problem. He would have simply one-handed it over the top of the offending tractor. Beaner being away, I struggled, pushed, and pulled (and cursed a little) until I squeezed it out the door.

I slopped a bit of gas in the tank, gave it a sniff of the 'Ether Bunny' and she fired right up. I ran 'er up a plank into the back of the pickup and headed for home.

At home things continued to hiccup. First I put in more gas, topped up the transmission

The doctor is in

Squirrel Pie

By Jack Elliott

lube, gave it one more sniff of ether and pulled the starter cord.

"Bang!!" it backfired and a ball of flame engulfed the back of my left hand and singed off my left eyebrow.

With my hat I quickly beat out the flames now licking at the gas tank and hurried into the house to run some cold water over my now turning pink hand. The grease I had already got pretty well smeared on my hands seemed to help the first aid process.

No cops or neighbours showed up at the scene of the explosion. With all the violence in the air these days I guess no one wanted to take a chance on being an innocent bystander. With the spilled gas dried up, I took another chance to fire up the beast. . . without the ether. . . and once purring I tore into the first garden, chewing up a bunch of discarded flower pot

root balls and trashy old vines I hadn't really got around to clearing up last fall. Oh well they'll make good mulch and the ones twisted up in the tiller. . . I'll cut them out later.

I finished the first piece and jumping the tiller over the retaining wall headed for patch number two. That's when the second medical emergency happened.

Not me! This time it was the tiller. Its fuel line, after a long, difficult life had developed hardening of the arteries and suffered a catastrophic aneurysm. The engine sputtered, died, and fuel from the just filled tank rushed out onto the drive in spite of my effort to apply a tourniquet.

I dragged out my tool box and prepared to carry out open heart surgery. I couldn't find suitable donor veins so in spite of the pronouncement about social distancing, I put on my face mask and headed down to Dr. Pickle's for a consult and supplies.

Pickle as usual had some gadget in a state of disassembly sticking out of the back of his

truck.

He peered over his glasses and guardedly inquired holding up his hand, "How are you for virus? Six feet! Six feet!"

"No Covid virus here. Maybe a touch of mad cow, though," I replied.

"A touch!" snorted Pickle, "We all know you're totally nuts."

After an intensive discussion on tiller open heart surgery, all the time maintaining 6 feet distance, Pickle found replacement arteries for the patient in the bowels of his dispensary.

I hurried back to the operating room and with the help of the new artery, a little JB Weld had the patient off the table and into the recovery room by lunch time. I threw in an oil change and tightened the drive belt for good measure. After lunch it was straight into rehab, marching up and down the garden at full tilt. No molly coddling here!

I wonder how much I should bill OHIP for this procedure. Can't I just use my Health Card?

First COVID cattle sale a success

How about this weather!?! Amazing morning. A bit of rain and you can instantly see the green grass. Just like that I felt like I was feeling calm and relaxed and BOOM - I need to be in three places at once.

I am so happy for the producers that are out on their land either preparing to seed or seeding. This is a much-deserved spring for them.

My student doesn't start at EARS until Monday, but I am hoping I can have things prepared for a busy week for her and I. We are cut back enough that I don't have the same overwhelmed feeling as some springs.

We sold 1425 animals at the Stratton Sales Barn on Saturday for \$1,638,140.53. It was strange to see the spectators missing from our Sales Barn. For the most part people were very respectable of the physical distancing rules.

We are thankful for Kim Desserre who managed the door, sign in sheet and who went around and sanitized door

handles and such every half hour.

There are people that don't believe in our current situation and we appreciate her handling everyone graciously.

Thank you to all our staff that showed up and did an excellent job of taking care of all these animals. This is not an easy job, but we really do have a great group of people that we count on regularly.

A special thank you to Dave Martin who not only shows up the week prior to the Sale and literally gets the water running but who will be around most of this week helping James clean everything up again. Thank you, Dave, you are appreciated by us all.

I think it was a true testament that our Rainy River raised cattle are worth the buyers driving many miles to attend the sale.

Our Eastern buyers who would normally fly in, drove. Our Western buyers also had to put on a few more miles as the border is closed.



Moos from the Herd

Kim Jo Bliss

Rooms were available but it isn't easy to find food, so it added another task to James to find food for Saturday.

Though you are not able to shake James' had right now, if you have time to thank him for hosting another great sale, I think it would be appreciated.

It isn't easy to run a regular sale but during the COVID situation it put a lot more stress on his shoulders.

We had a group of excellent cattle! I would say likely one of our best spring sales. The cattle looked good.

James mentioned that the buyers were commenting on the great run of cattle as well.

Great job to our producers! Thank you to everyone who made this another successful weekend and we will be back to offer some more great Rainy River raised cattle in August!

Lambing is nearly complete with only two yearlings left to lamb.

This coming weekend we will booster vaccines with the cow herd and sort out groups for breeding. I am hoping that the new bull I purchased will arrive home this weekend.

We will sort into three groups and it takes time to get the right cows with the right cows in the right spot!

I will likely jinx myself, but the yard is staying nice to work in and that will make the task a bit more enjoyable!

I participated in a Birthday parade! A big shout out to Landon Teeple who is celebrating his birthday and since no partying allowed, we did a parade through his driveway!

It was so great, and I understand his was really touched!

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