A Sporting Alternative

Sport cattle may help cattle growers round up their profits.

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There’s no question that sport is big business in North America and now cattle growers have a chance to get into the game by supplying animals for the competitive roping and rodeo events that have been rapidly increasing in popularity in recent years.¹ The United States Team Roping Championships, Inc., which sponsors team roping events, has more than 100,000 members and estimates that nearly 1.5 million individuals participated in team roping in the United States in 2004.² The Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association (PRCA) sanctions 750–800 annual rodeos attended by nearly 20 million spectators and watched by millions more on ESPN and TNN. The National Finals Rodeo (NFR) is attended by 170,000 spectators every December in Las Vegas. The National High School Rodeo Association is one of the fastest growing youth organizations in the nation, with an annual membership of more than 10,500 students from 40 states, 5 Canadian provinces, and Australia. It sanctions more than 1,100 rodeos each year. Overall, rodeo attracted 24 million spectators in 2004, placing it seventh overall in total spectators at any one sport.³ Not all people who compete and use sport cattle will belong to these large, organized associations. In addition, there are many smaller, local groups that contribute to the market for sport cattle. These participants and spectators are hooked on sports that in 2004 required an estimated 35,000 head of cattle.

Cattle as Sporting Goods

Considering cattle as “recreational goods” raises their price on a per unit basis. In the world of economics, recreational goods have what economists call an “inelastic demand function.”⁴ That essentially means that even when the price goes up, people keep buying. When it comes to sporting events that rely on cattle, participants and spectators alike consider related expenses as “necessary” and not an “extra.” Even when their disposable incomes go down, these items are not eliminated from their budgets. The good news is that disposable incomes in the United States have risen substantially in the past several decades. According to the US Bureau of Economic Analysis, in 1970, the disposable income of the average American was $3,600. In 2003, it had risen to $27,275.⁵ Adjusted for inflation, this is a 6.3% annual rate of increase.

Feeding demand on the participant side is the prize money. The NFR alone offers more than $2 million in prize money. The PRCA offers $22 million in prize money annually. The US Team Roping Championships presented more than $16 million in prize money in 2003.⁶ Team roping and rodeo competitors maintain the idea that they will win money while being involved in these recreation events, just like gamblers who always expect to win.

Beefing up the Bottom Line?

The major sport cattle sellers say that Corriente is the breed of choice for roping and steer wrestling. They are preferred by ropers and wrestlers because of their longevity, size, and durability. Corriente cattle can be traced to 1493 when the Span-