

Trading time

I am an irregular American—only sort of human—a black sheep, you could say. My detractors would lump me in with the loafers, deadbeats, drunks, gamblers, hoboes and tramps. Yes, it's true, I have to admit that I have always belonged to that lower class of people known as "fall calvers." There, I said it. Do those of you who calve your cows in the spring time think less of me now?

I thought so.

Because the vast majority of cattlemen in this country calve their cows in the spring, those of us who calve in the fall are discriminated against, victimized and looked down upon by those smug ranchers who think they are superior just because they calve in blizzards and don't have to watch calvey heifers during the holidays.

As fall calvers, we are as out of step as a 5-year-old baton twirler. All the cattlemen's magazines and newspapers run special calving sections on how to pull a calf about the time our calves already weigh 400 pounds, and most cattlemen's confabs are planned around the schedules of those ranchers who calve in the spring.

While snooty spring calving ranchers are drinking frothy cocktails in some big-city convention center bar, we are busy branding our neighbor's calves.

My fellow fall calvers and I are contrarians. We shape our hats differently, don't tie hard and fast and wouldn't be caught dead in snow boots and those goofy looking caps with flaps hanging down over the ears. No round hay bales, snow tires or frozen tails for us!

Because of the discrimination we face as fall calvers I'm thinking of forming a nonprofit organization for my fellow victims called the Association of Fall and Late Autumn Calvers, or AFLAC® for short. Perhaps we could borrow a certain whacky duck to do funny commercials for

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Written by Lee Pitts

Wednesday, 04 April 2012 07:35 -

us on television.

Spring calving ranchers take advantage of us in many ways. In my state, the northern half calves in the spring while the southern half calves in the fall, so the spring-calving ranchers cull their late calving cows and sell them to us unsuspecting fall calving cattlemen in special cow sales as extremely fertile fall calvers who conceived on their first heat. I heard an auctioneer refer to just such a group as, "So fertile all the bull has to do is look at them and they conceive."

One man's late calver is another man's Fertile Myrtle, and the spring-fall cow trade has fooled many of us into buying the northerner's reluctant breeders. So I figured, why not pull the reverse trade and outsmart those treacherous and deceitful spring calving ranchers by sending my late fall calvers north where they'd bring top dollar as early spring calvers? I'd beat them at their own game!

After a few years of enjoying this profitable off-season trade I was sitting ringside at a northern special cow sale when, believe it or not, I saw one of my old late fall calvers mixed in with a bunch of early spring calvers. I nearly choked on my gum when the auctioneer said words to the effect, "Obviously these early calving cows are so fertile all the bull had to do was look at them and they were safe in calf." Where had I heard that before?

This was one of my cows he was bragging about! It was the first time an auctioneer had ever said a kind word about anything wearing my brand, even if it was a bunch of bologna. I was as proud of my old cow as a new papa, and she looked in fine flesh too, probably as a result of having had only one calf in the four years since I sold her to some unsuspecting spring calving cowboy.

I'd have bought her back too if I thought for one minute that the barren old bitty would have lived long enough to make the return trip north in another couple years.

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Holyoke Enterprise April 5, 2012