

## Presidents Corner

Wow, what a way to end 2010 and start 2011. I would like to thank everyone for their continued support of the ATA and I will strive to see that we move forward promoting one of the best lines of cattle available. I look forward to working with our members to renew our commitment to promote Tarentaise cattle, improve our organization, and to continue to develop cattle that are not only efficient, easy keepers, but also improve the bottom line through longevity, genetics, and predictability.

Let me introduce myself to those who I have not met, even though I hope to meet more of you over the next few years as we try to grow our association. I started a Tarentaise herd not too far back when I attended a Beef Expo only a couple hundred miles from home. I sat down on the bleachers and started to watch these cattle come through that were larger than the ones I had on the farm at the time, and calves that were only a few days old that looked like a few of my calves that were 2-3 months old. I kept asking this older gentleman sitting beside me how you could raise a horse out of cows. The older gentleman told me I needed to just sit on my hands and watch, the best cattle would be coming in the ring shortly. Of course, I had my son with me and he was getting a little anxious. So the older gentleman told me I should go back to the barn and look in the left hand lanes. My son was excited about that so off we went. After about 10 minutes, we had already be introduced to some heifers produced by Rob Block (my son was petting them through the corral panels), we had met Dennis Puppe, and were told there was an older gentleman at the sale ring we should talk with.

Back we went to find the older gentleman and get a registration card. I told the older gentleman that I was going to get scolded if I bought any of these red cattle, but then I got a history lesson that I paid attention too, unlike the ones I got while in school, and I have not forgotten. That older gentleman was Doc H. Q. Tucker, he told me about the breed, the history, the handling ease, and the efficiency of these cattle. I left the sale with two cow calf pairs and a bred heifer and returned home to take my beating. It has been ten years, I still have one of the cow calf pairs and that bred heifer, Miss July, who will forever be endeared to my youngest daughter. My family runs a commercial cow/calf operation on owned and leased property of gently rolling land in southwestern Virginia. We rent from older farmers who have decided to stop doing it on their own but love to see the cattle roaming the fields. I continually have folks stop along the road to ask where my cattle come from and their pictures have been added to websites at the university and local farmer web pages. I will have to admit that after growing up with black cattle all around us it is quite the picture to see a field full of red cattle.

I have a set of twins (one Girl and one Boy) that will be starting their senior years of college next fall. One will become a teacher and the other a meteorologist. One profession where you can tell students what they need to know and they can't tell you "you're wrong" and the other where you tell folks what you think it is going to do and, if you are right more than 20% of the time, they love you. My youngest, freshman in High school, wants to be a veterinarian but I don't think she has the heart to see anything go bad. We will play that by ear. My wife comes from the city and never knew anything about farming until she met me. After 22 years, I finally got her to come out to drive the truck when we pick up hay, but that is only if she does not have to roll down the window and the air conditioner continues to work well. However, she will go get me something to drink on occasion and bring me dinner when I call and beg!

But I need to talk about where we are and what we need to work on. As you can see from this article, I was selected to serve as your President for 2011, Mr. Michael Honald was selected as the Vice-President, Mr. Andrew King agreed to continue as our Treasurer, and Mr. Brian Davenport agreed to continue as our Secretary. Mrs. Maureen Mack Kullman, Mr. Leonard Sherriff, Mr. Dan Braesch, Mr. Phillip Anderson, and Mr. Robert Collier agreed to serve as directors. These folks have offered their time and expenses to assist our organization as we grow into the next decade.

When we met at the National Western Show in Denver, we noted several things that need to be developed. The first item that was conceded was that there was no National Tarentaise Show in Denver this year. While that was a disappointment to several folks who had hoped to attend, it was a further disappointment to note that the NWSS told us that any future shows will begin in the Yards. I firmly believe this was a great opportunity that our organization missed out on. Any time we, as Tarentaise breeders, have an opportunity to show other folks what we are doing and what these cattle can do, we need to be there to point this out. When I tell people on the East Coast I raise Tarentaise Cattle, I get a blank look. However, when I show them what I can do, they ask me for information. We need to push that out as far as we can! Another issue at hand was our National By-Laws, which seem to be followed or not as the situation dictates. This item will be discussed further in following issues of the talk. There are several areas that need to be cleaned up and re-addressed, not the least of is our definition of Junior Members and Opti-Mom cattle. But you will see more on these things shortly.

Another issue is getting members to participate and understand how they can help. We had a difficult time finding nine members of our organization who would serve the organization. I hope, in the next few months, to have a list of folks who would like to assist. **YOU CANNOT EFFECT CHANGE IF YOU DO NOT PARTICIPATE.** My goal is to have more folks wanting to help than we have positions to fill!!

Membership is on the decline. As with many organizations, people need to feel they are part of a group that is growing, educated, excited, and on the move. We have rested on our laurels long enough. It is time to stand back up and get to work letting people know we are still here. I am challenging our membership to get out and talk to folks about the ATA, about our cattle, and about what we can help others do. We have a great product but less and less folks are talking about it. Have you ever heard someone say “The best secret is the one nobody wants to hear”? Well, if nobody wants to hear about it then why is it a secret at all? It is useless information that nobody cares about! Is ATA membership a secret? Are Tarentaise cattle your secret? Let’s get the word out that we are still around. We can make a difference, and many of the big boys are now trying to get back to where we have always been. Our membership needs to be growing. We have a great product, but we just need to let people know what our secret is. Let’s start whispering in the next ear and maybe shout a little. Some of these folks are getting a little hard of hearing!

It is that time again, dues were due last month along with the first or only CHR payments as well. The office has set up online payments through paypal, Sandy is available to help in any way she can. Please note that our ability to function, market, grow, advertise, and ensure updated genetic information is available, depends on our income. If you have not already done so, please take the time to record your information and forward your payments. If you have any questions, give Sandy a shout in the office or e-mail her, she will be happy to assist. We also are always looking for advertiser’s in the talk, if you would like to see your farm recognized in the talk, give Sandy a call. Business card sized ads and larger are available.

We are in the process of updating our literature available to the public and making it available for distribution. The Tarentaise Today literature is being re-worked and hopefully will be available for use after the summer meeting in July. If you have information on your cattle or Tarentaise cattle in general that can be included such as carcass values, quotes from finishers, quotes from buyers, testing station comparisons between breeds, please send those in. You can mail the information to the office or email to the office or me at [mlafon@vt.edu](mailto:mlafon@vt.edu). My hope is to have this publication not only ready for distribution this year, but have a publication that can be updated, reprinted, and redistributed on a regular basis. Updated information is the key. I know our members are raising superior animals, producing the best carcass qualities available, and keeping it all to ourselves! If you have the information, we need it, and we need it now. It is time to come out of the closet. Keep an eye on the website and look for new information to become available for self printing and distribution. You have to get out there and talk to folks about your cattle, but we are going to help give you some information to hand out to push them into your hands.

Our summer meeting plans are set. We hope everyone who has time will attend. I would love nothing more than to have to find a bigger place to host our next meeting. The summer meeting will be held in Blacksburg, Virginia on July 14 – 16, 2011. Our first Board session will begin on Thursday July 14<sup>th</sup> at 6pm in the Boardroom of the Holiday Inn. We will have a morning session on the 15<sup>th</sup> then have a tour of the Virginia Tech University Beef Production facilities nearby. We will be visiting the McDonald Farm run by a seventh generation farmer Mr. Bill McDonald. They have been raising Simmental cattle for a few generations. There are several things to see and check out. The University is a beautiful place to visit. We have Mountain Lake which is home to one of the largest natural lakes on the top of a mountain with a long history and site of the Film Dirty Dancing with Patrick Swayze. Natural Bridge is about 1.5 hours away and the Blue Ridge Parkway is only 45 minutes away. We hope to have a great time and produce some great ideas. The link to the hotel for reservations is [www.theythotel.com](http://www.theythotel.com), our group code is SSO. I look forward to seeing everyone there.

If you don’t know me, let me say that I am not a mind reader and I am very bad at picking things up through osmosis. If you have an idea or suggestion, please let me know. I believe communication is key to the growth of our Organization. Please let me know what you are thinking. We have set up a YAHOO page “ATANow”, and a Facebook page “American Tarentaise”. Our office has e-mail and phone and you now have my e-mail above. Let’s get the word out! The American Tarentaise Association is up and running. We have a superior product and superior people. It’s no secret that I want to keep. I am spreading the word as much as I can, and I hope you will join with me to do the same. Send me your comments or questions and I will do the best I can to answer them or I will find someone who can answer. I look forward to hearing from you,

Mike