

Injection infection

Getting on the receiving end of the needle

June 30, 2003

“Someone ought to give him a taste of his own medicine.” That’s the phrase you hear when we think someone should be on the receiving end of the treatment they’re giving.

I reckon my cows have muttered that in cow-speak as I’ve poked, pilled and poured a variety of animal health products into and onto them throughout the years.

Last week, they finally gave me a taste of my own medicine.



Head-butting heifer

I had the most recent addition to the herd squeezed between my knees for the ritual ear tagging and a shot of “seven way” clostridial vaccine.

I was just fixin’ to give Junior his injection when I saw something big and black coming at me from the corner of my eye. Mama and me met head to head, and when she hit me, my vaccinating hand flew toward my free hand and buried the syringe needle in the muscle at the base of my left index finger.

“Ouch, sweet pea, that really hurt,” I told the cow. Or something like that.

At any rate, I pulled the needle out of my hand, stuck it in the calf and finished the job. Meanwhile, in less than 10 seconds my finger puffed up like a flesh-colored balloon.

I tagged another calf and read the label on the vaccine bottle as I drove home with my throbbing left hand. It read, “Accidental injection to humans can cause serious local reactions. Contact a physician immediately if accidental injection occurs.”

I don’t know who these physicians are that you’re supposed to be able to reach in the evening, but I tried a clinic phone number and they routed me to the emergency room and the receptionist there told me to call my veterinarian.

I tried to explain to her that I was of a species that was supposed to use an MD, not a DVM, but I hung up and called a vet that I knew. When he found out who was calling, he recommended amputation. I told him I’d kind of like to keep the finger so I could cut it off with a table saw someday.

He said there was no imminent danger if I didn’t actually inject the product, but he told me to keep an eye on it and see a doctor if it kept swelling or got discolored.

Bend over

It kept swelling, it kept hurting, it got red and splotchy. I gave it two days of cowboy stoicism and decided to stop in a clinic on my way through town.

The nurse practitioner was a little alarmed with my lack of treatment. I got a tetanus booster, an antibiotic prescription, an X-ray and a referral to a hand specialist.

Concerned with the neglected infection, she ordered a dose of injectable antibiotic that would go right to work. She told me to drop my pants and assume the position.

I looked at the needle (long), the syringe (huge) and its contents (cold and irritable).

I thought about correcting her desire to inject me in the hindquarter, letting her know that Beef Quality Assurance guidelines dictate that all shots go ahead of the shoulder. But the thought of her pinching my neck and putting that needle in there didn’t appeal to me any more than sticking me in the rump.

So I just stepped up and grabbed a hold of the table, grinned, bared it and beared it.

Immediately, my finger seemed to feel better. It probably still hurt, but my hind end hurt more and it took the attention off my finger.

Cattle throughout my herd were probably smiling with revenge.