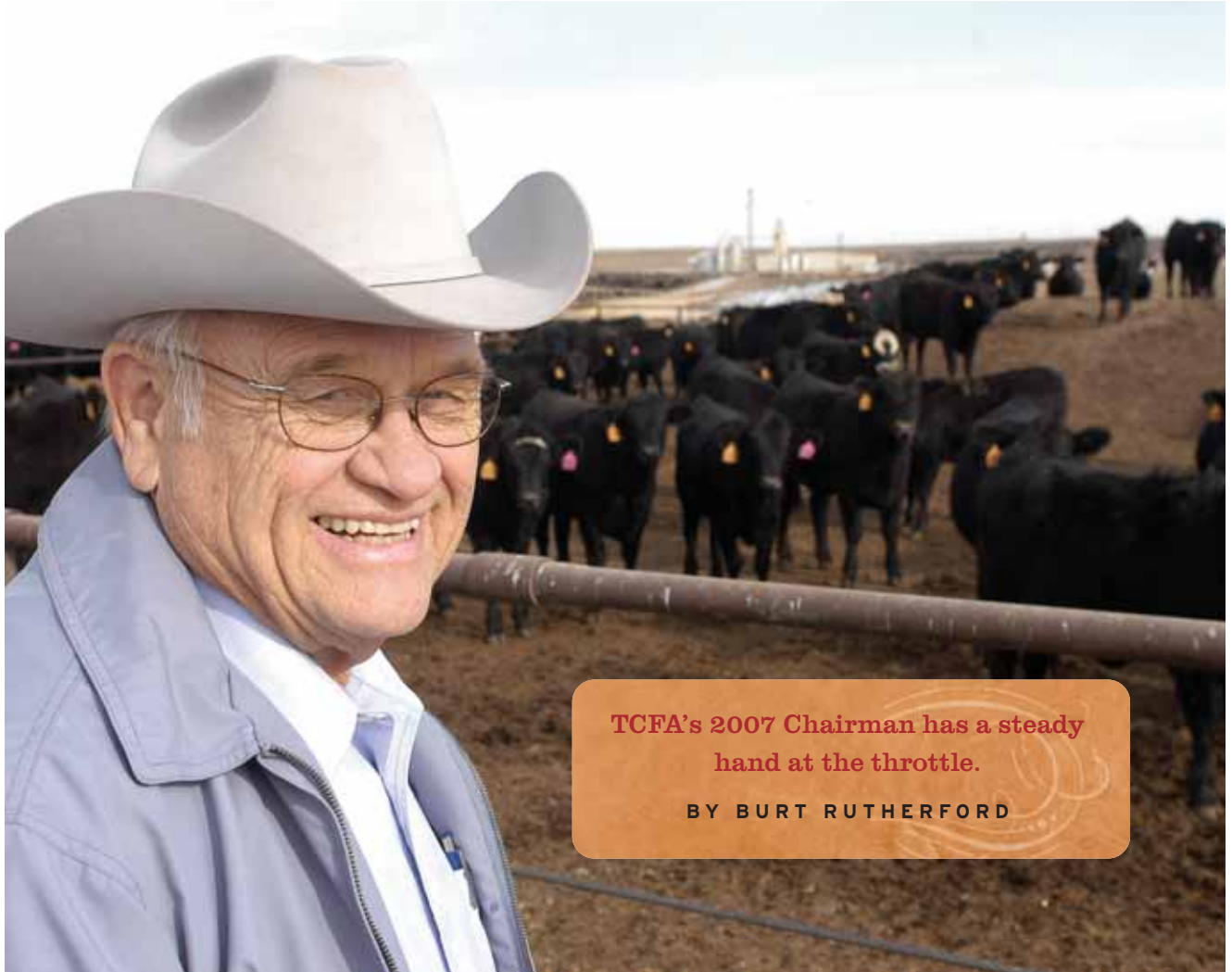




# Don McCasland



**TCFA's 2007 Chairman has a steady hand at the throttle.**

**BY BURT RUTHERFORD**

**The reception area at the office in Don McCasland's feedyard has a comfortable feel,** like walking into an old friend's house. It should, decorated as it is with mementos of Don's youth. Furniture from his parent's house greets you, just as it welcomed many visitors for many years in his hometown of Clovis, N.M. Old photographs grace the walls, each one with a story to tell.

When you ask McCasland about the pictures and furniture, it is the table lamps, perhaps more than anything else, that tell his story. Built of progressively smaller wood blocks, they are solid, unpretentious and functional. He built them in high school wood shop. "I never did turn anything on a lathe," he says of his time in wood shop. "I wanted to be different and original."

## THE MAN

Solid and unpretentious. An original thinker who doesn't follow the crowd. A self-made man who continues to relish the challenges of a very challenging industry.

That's Don McCasland, TCFA's 2007 chairman.

By the time he made those table lamps, McCasland already knew agriculture was his future, and he had a solid background to get him there. His grandfather was a successful farmer and rancher in the Clovis area, as was his father. Yet he inherited very little in the way of material possessions from them. What he got instead is the fire of an entrepreneur and the ability to look at problems as challenges.

An old picture on the wall of the reception area tells that story. It's a picture of an old house with a few cattle around



it. Don's grandfather, looking for ways to be more efficient in his cattle operation, started buying abandoned homestead houses for pennies on the dollar. He'd move them to a pasture, cut off the outside walls a foot or so above the floor and attach feed troughs. He then would fill the houses with feed, where it would stay dry and gravity flow into the troughs for the cattle. Don says his grandfather is generally credited with inventing the self feeder.

That same intellectual curiosity and ability to look at situations from unique perspectives has characterized Don throughout his lifetime. He has served on almost every TCFA committee and has been chairman of several. He is a regular fixture at almost any industry meeting, from local Extension seminars to major national conventions. You can usually find him near the front of the room, absorbing every bit of knowledge and information he can. "You can always learn something," he says, "and you can never meet too many people."

Perhaps the most telling story of Don's curiosity and drive to be more efficient, though, was his work in the 1980s and 1990s in developing options strategies for cattle. "I started out looking for answers for myself," he says, "and as I studied and learned, I enjoyed sharing that with others."

Don was fortunate to have his son, Stacy, working with him in Clovis at the time. Don would develop the strategies and Stacy would plug the numbers into a computer and generate the graphs, charts and tables they used to determine the best strategies for the market conditions. "Poor Stacy would have to print out 200 options strategies on every open pen of cattle we had," Don says. At his peak, Don had developed around 1,000 different options strategies for cattle.

As his reputation as an options expert grew, he was invited to share his knowledge. "I've had anywhere from five people come to a meeting to 1,500," he says. He and Stacy were invited to Chicago to ring the opening bell for the introduction of feeder options. "It happened to be my birthday. It was the largest birthday party I ever had—2,000 people at that party and no cake." But, he adds only after being prompted, they did have breakfast with the president of the exchange.

Learning something and meeting new people. Those who know him will tell you that's another Don McCasland characteristic, as is his drive to always do better, be better

and get better. "I don't believe in retirement," he says. "I never did live my life to where I would reach a point that I would have enough to retire on. The last thing I want to do is quit and get something to pull down the road as a retirement trailer. I don't enjoy that. I enjoy the business. And, after all, I am a cattle feeder, so you never have made any money until you don't own the next one."

Don's been buying the next one for a good many years now, and he doesn't plan on stopping.

"I bought my first land when I was 16," he says. "I bought 800 acres because I wanted to start owning some property." That 800 acres has grown to 9,000 acres of farmland around Clovis, plus Texas properties including a ranch near Brady and a feedyard just outside of Wheeler. He also has three leased ranches around Buffalo and Fairfield, Texas. "Bought my first car at 16, got married at 18 to the same girl I had been going with since the 7th grade. I'm one of these guys who starts early and doesn't quit."

#### TCFA

That's a trait that will serve cattle feeders well in 2007, with the challenges the industry will face. McCasland sees TCFA well suited to help its members meet those challenges head on.

"I think it's the best cattle organization there is," he says

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of TCFA. "I think it's a model for all other organizations. That's due to excellent volunteer leadership and such a tremendously well-run staff." TCFA's leadership, members and staff will all be challenged by a number of issues, both at home and abroad. One of the main challenges McCasland expects during his term are the ongoing struggles with South Korea and Japan.

"I want us to be a part of free trade," he says. "I want us to be more involved as an association in helping develop free trade across the world. The United States is only 4% of the world's population, and we need to be going to the other 96%. Our potential lies in free trade."

Another issue that sprang up in 2006—and will continue as an issue for cattle feeders in 2007 and beyond—is high grain prices driven by ethanol demand. "Right now,



we've got a tremendous challenge in the cattle feeding industry," he says. "Our government has chosen to subsidize a source of energy that happens to be a competitor. So we're having to outbid that before we can start on its value for us."

If that continues, it will force some fundamental changes in the cattle business, he fears. Calf prices will get cheaper, he predicts, as will yearling prices. "It's going to be very telling on the price of beef and it's going to eliminate some players in this business. I think it will come down to who's the most efficient and survival of the fittest, because it's going to be tougher and tougher competition."

As an individual entrepreneur and owner of a small feedyard, that concerns McCasland, but he's aware that the business has always been challenging and has always been changing. He recalls a time in the late 1960s and early 70s when he was analyzing his father's operation with an eye toward buying it. "He had seven circles south of Clovis and fed his cattle at Clovis Feedyard. Nearly all those cattle went

to the packer weighing 1,000 lbs. or less. He'd buy them weighing 350, go to the feedyard weighing 600 and out weighing 1,000."

Now, fed cattle head to town weighing several hundred pounds more. "The thing about this business is, over the years, change is normal. We've got to fit into that change, figure out what it is. Adaptability is going to be the key. Always has been."

McCasland also foresees some challenges from the EPA on air and water regulations, as well as the ongoing need to keep cattlemen up-to-date with the many good things the beef checkoff does for the industry. He's confident that TCFA is up to the task, because he's confident in the people—leadership, members and staff—who make TCFA what it is.

McCasland doesn't have a personal agenda for his term as chairman. "I want the association to serve the industry the very best way possible. I want us to move along, do a good job on the things we need to do, respond to whatever problems we have." McCasland says he's just a small cog in a big wheel—a wheel that's been spinning for a long time.

The oil that has kept that wheel spinning is the elbow grease and sweat equity that members have invested in the association. McCasland knows a little about that. As the man with his thumb on the oil can for the

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next year, he's thrilled and humbled by the chance to serve TCFA.

McCasland says he was originally inspired by the late Charlie Ball, TCFA's long-time executive vice president. "Charlie gave me some early advice, way back when I first started. He told me, just keep coming. So I did. That is probably why I'm where I am today." 🐮

Editor's Note—Burt Rutherford is the former TCFA communications director. He serves as senior editor of *BEEF magazine*.