

Opinion: Should we name the animals we raise to eat?

By Laura Jean Schneider, High Country News

There's a taboo about naming the creatures you eat, but I'm guilty. "Twisty" was one of the first calves born last year, a red Angus heifer whose spine curved to the left. "Della" was one of our Gap 4 Natural Beeves who'd somehow severed a tendon in one of her front legs in the weaning pasture.

Twisty lived most of her life out on the range, walking a little to the left. Her growth was so stunted I knew she'd be destined for early slaughter. When Sam brought the calf that became Della into the corral, maggots had already taken over the wound. We walked her up to the squeeze chute where I could get a better look: Her left leg hung useless. After excavating the maggots, I cleaned the wound out and wrapped it.

I gave it my best shot. Several times a week I walked Della into the squeeze to doctor her leg. Soon, I had just to open the gates and she'd go in on her own. She would eat cottonseed cake from my fingertips after I finished wrapping her up, and come when I called. While she became more mobile, and the wound closed remarkably well for a tendon injury, it was clear that as she got larger, she would have a harder time navigating.

This fall, when we sorted and shipped the calves, Twisty stayed behind with Della. They had a big pen to themselves and all the alfalfa they could eat. I knew where this was headed.

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