

Two Bits

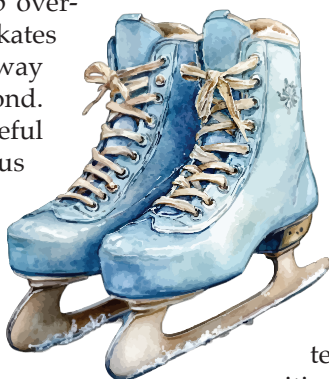


Julie Ellingson,
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I found myself in unfamiliar territory in March, sitting in the stands of an ice rink for my inaugural skating show. I was there to watch the daughters of a couple of my friends perform. My kids never skated, and my own experience on the ice is limited to a few childhood memories lacing up oversized, hand-me-down skates and gingerly making my way across a frozen stock pond. There was nothing graceful about it — just cautious steps and the occasional hard landing in front of an all-bovine audience watching from one pasture over.

So, when the lights dimmed and the music started, I didn't quite know what to expect. What I saw, though, was nothing short of impressive. Those young skaters didn't just move, they performed. They glided across the ice with confidence, executing turns, spins and formations with precision that comes from hours of



practice. Even more striking was the synchronization. Groups of skaters moved as one — each step timed perfectly and each transition seamless. It was a reminder that behind every polished performance is a tremendous amount of coordination, discipline and trust in the people around you.

Watching it all unfold, I couldn't help but think about the beef industry.

From a distance, both may appear simple, but as anyone involved in cattle production knows, our industry is anything but. Like a skating routine, it depends on a series of inter-

connected steps — each critical to the success of the final outcome. When everything is working in harmony, the result is impressive, but when one part stumbles, the effects can ripple throughout the system.

Because of the interplay between segments, a disruption in one can quickly and dramatically affect the others and expose how delicate the cattle supply chain can be.

This has been a topic of discussion in industry circles lately, sparked by a few current events. Among them: proposed bills that would prohibit processors from harvesting more than one species and phase out existing concentrated animal feeding operations, as well as an ongoing (at press time anyway) labor strike at a major JBS plant in Greeley, Colo.

The strike in Colorado involves roughly 3,800 workers represented by the United Food and Commercial Workers Local 7 Union, who walked out after contract negotiations stalled. The plant is one of the nation's largest,

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