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Healthy Bulls & Females

Maintaining a healthy breeding herd requires attention to genetics, nutrition and temperament, as well as immunization and treatment protocols.

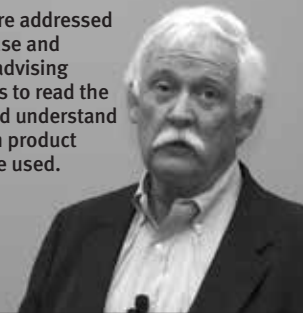
Story & photos by
TROY SMITH, *field editor*

It's not just about timely doctoring of cattle ills and disease immunization with vaccine programs. Maintaining a healthy breeding herd and calf crop means paying attention to genetics, nutrition and temperament, too. Appropriate use of all health management tools was addressed by veterinarian Randall Spare of the Ashland Veterinary Center, Ashland, Kan., and Merck technical services veterinarian Mark Spire, during the 2015 National Angus Convention Nov. 3-5 in Overland Park, Kan.

Speaking to cattle producers attending an Angus University workshop, Spare said excelling in animal health management prepares animals to succeed. It can be a "price-maker," adding value to sale animals and decreasing risk. It starts, he said, with genetics.

"Use genetic selection to avoid dystocia. We have the tools — EPDs (expected progeny differences) for calving ease, birth weight, docility and heifer pregnancy," said Spare, noting that calving difficulty poses health risks to both calves and their dams. He also recommended application of selection and culling pressure for temperament.

Mark Spire addressed vaccine use and misuse, advising producers to read the labels and understand how each product should be used.



"Docility is more than a convenience trait. 'Sporty' cattle cause a myriad of problems on the ranch and can be hard to merchandise. Docility pays in the feedyard, too," stated Spare, citing temperament-related effects on performance and carcass merit that can result in value differences of up to \$40 per head.

"Responsible managers use low-stress cattle-handling methods, maintain adequate working facilities and train employees and family members to handle cattle properly," he added, encouraging producers to include docility in the seedstock selection criteria.

Spare said attention to nutrition begins with making sure newborn calves receive adequate colostrum, which affords passive transfer of immunity to pathogens. Calling colostrum "liquid



or electronically, make them mobile,” advised Spire, “so you can pass them on to the next owner. It’s a way of adding value to your calves.”

Spare and Spire spoke as part of Angus University, which featured an industry-leading lineup of speakers and panelists who explored “A Story of a Steak” and what it will take to supply high-quality beef to consumers worldwide. An extension of

the award-winning series of articles in the *High Plains Journal* and segments on *The Angus Report*, the convention series was sponsored by Merck Animal Health.

To listen to their presentations and to view their PowerPoints, visit the convention newsroom at <http://angusjournal.com/NCnTS/2015/index.html>.

Editor’s Note: This article is part of the online coverage of the Angus Means Business National Convention & Trade Show provided by Angus Media. Visit the convention newsroom available at <http://angusjournal.com/NCnTS/2015/index.html> to access additional summaries, PowerPoint presentations and the audio of the sessions.



gold,” Spare said calves that fail to receive timely and sufficient colostrum are three times more likely to get sick. Those that do become sick are five times more likely to die within the first 28 days of life.

Recommending monitoring of body condition scores, Spare said cow nutrition directly influences colostrum quality and quantity. He also referenced fetal programming research indicating that the dam’s nutritional status during gestation has lifetime effects on her calf’s health and performance.

Turning to the feeding of breeding bulls during postweaning development, Spare warned producers to protect the animals developing rumens by avoiding feeding high-starch diets. He recommended rations high in forage,



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with supplemental grain byproduct feedstuffs. Spare said parasite control is particularly important for young, growing animals.

Spare said control of bovine viral diarrhea (BVD) is the cornerstone of a herd health management program, noting that persistently infected (PI) calves represent the source of 90% of all BVD infections. In his opinion, he said, all breeding bulls should be tested and sold as PI-negative.

“Test your calves and practice biosecurity. Maintain your fences, and don’t lease bulls,” added Spare.

Tips for vaccine use

Mark Spire addressed vaccine use and misuse, advising producers to read the labels and understand how each product should be used. That means understanding whether it is a killed, live or adjuvanted product and if a booster is required. It means knowing the duration of protection that can be expected and any possible side effects.

Spire also recommended good recordkeeping, including recording the product name, serial number, expiration date and storage conditions. When administered to animals, records should indicate animal identification numbers, and the date, dose and route of administration.

“Whether you keep records on paper