



Your Link to

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Postweaning Options

One good thing about the cattle business is its flexibility. Independent-minded producers like to keep their options open to manage and market calves in whatever way best fits a certain time and place. That's why most producers are considering postweaning management programs (PMPs). The benefits can be substantial.

When there are thousands of producers marketing calves every year, is there added value in being "one of the guys," or does being a standout create value?

Think of a well-designed PMP as a neon sign that sets your calves apart from the crowd. Backgrounding and PMPs add value because both buyers and retained owners see it as a risk-management

tool protecting against sickness, altering marketing dates to take advantage of seasonal highs, and optimizing the nutritional level and performance of calves both in the feedyard and on the rail.

Single-ranch studies have shown that preconditioned calves can gain faster, more efficiently and cheaper than "weaned and shipped" herdmates. Data from Oklahoma State

University suggests that one treatment for bovine respiratory disease (BRD) can significantly reduce the number of carcasses grading USDA Choice, and if calves are treated more than once for respiratory disease, more detrimental effects on quality grade can be seen.

Even sale-barn calves can benefit from the added value of PMPs.

Researchers at Colorado State University analyzed seven years of sale data from calves sold through Superior Livestock Video Auctions. The researchers found that buyers rewarded progressive cow-calf producers by paying premiums of up to \$3.89 per hundredweight (cwt.) for calves participating in PMPs.

Buyers also placed higher values on calves that were not only

vaccinated, but were also part of a structured value-added health program when compared to calves that were not preconditioned. Oklahoma sale-barn data agrees, showing calves sold through a special preconditioned calf sale topped the cash market for similar cattle by \$2-\$8 per cwt.

Where's the value?

But where does the real value lie?



Partnering with CAB feedlots can help you get the most from backgrounding programs.

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Reputation. A reputation that will bring buyers back next year looking for your calves. A reputation that will urge feedyards to buy or partner on your calves even in tough times like these.

A PMP may not be for all cattle or all situations. You can pass up the added value and send problem cattle on down the line to somebody more or less prepared for them. If your calves are going to a sale barn that has no preconditioned calf sales, the extra cost might not be justified. Remember though, one of the benefits of a backgrounding phase can be more weight to sell.

Once you decide to implement some kind of program, there are many avenues that can be pursued. You might decide to precondition your calves, ensuring pre- and postweaning shots are given and breaking calves to a bunk and grain feed, then either feed

or sell them. You might implement a backgrounding phase, growing your calves for a period of time before either selling or feeding. One of the most progressive options would be to work closely with a Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) licensed feedyard to create a coordinated management system that will target your calves for a high-quality end point before they ever leave the cow.

Managers and operators of CAB-licensed feedyards are always in the market for high-quality Angus and Angus-cross feeder cattle. Cattle that can remain healthy and meet high-quality carcass targets are consistently the most profitable cattle in the feedyard. Cattle that are adequately prepared for entering the feeding period have gone a long way toward meeting those high expectations. By working with these feedyards, you can match your PMP to a finishing program, allowing for maximum efficiency.

To partner with a CAB feedlot when you want to sell calves, look up the licensed partners in your area, or in any areas you would consider. Begin to develop a relationship with these yards. Ask about what kind of management practices at the ranch really add value to high-quality feeder cattle.

Aggressively market your cattle as value-added, not as just another load from one of the guys.

It's critical at this point to keep records of what has been done to the cattle. One CAB feedlot manager puts it this way: "If producers want a premium for their calves, we have to have a known history." Don't expect feedyards to pay something for nothing. Provide evidence that value has been added to your calves.

Valuable partnerships

If you are interested in retaining full or partial ownership of your cattle, CAB feedlots can help there as well. Most yards are willing to partner with customers during the feeding phase. This allows you to relieve some of the financial burden of delayed cash flow, while gaining access to a valuable partner in the feeding process. You

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should be marketing your value-added calves before they ever hit the ground. A feedlot manager who knows he will be feeding those calves in a few months can help.

Your new partner can help you prepare your calves for the experience of their yard, coordinating wintering, backgrounding and vaccination programs that complement what

your cattle will experience in the feedyard. When your calves show up at the receiving pens, they are ready to grow and grade.

It's been said many times, "you can't manage what you can't measure." That becomes very clear when you decide to improve the genetics of your cattle. By partnering with a licensed feedyard, you can tap into the greatest resource — information on your calves.

CAB feedlots have access to the most experienced hands in the industry at collecting data on high-quality Angus and Angus-cross cattle at the plants. Through the Feedlot-Licensing Program (FLP), you and your feeder-partner can match the level of carcass data with the level of individual cattle management, providing valuable information about feedlot performance, health and carcass merit of your calves.

