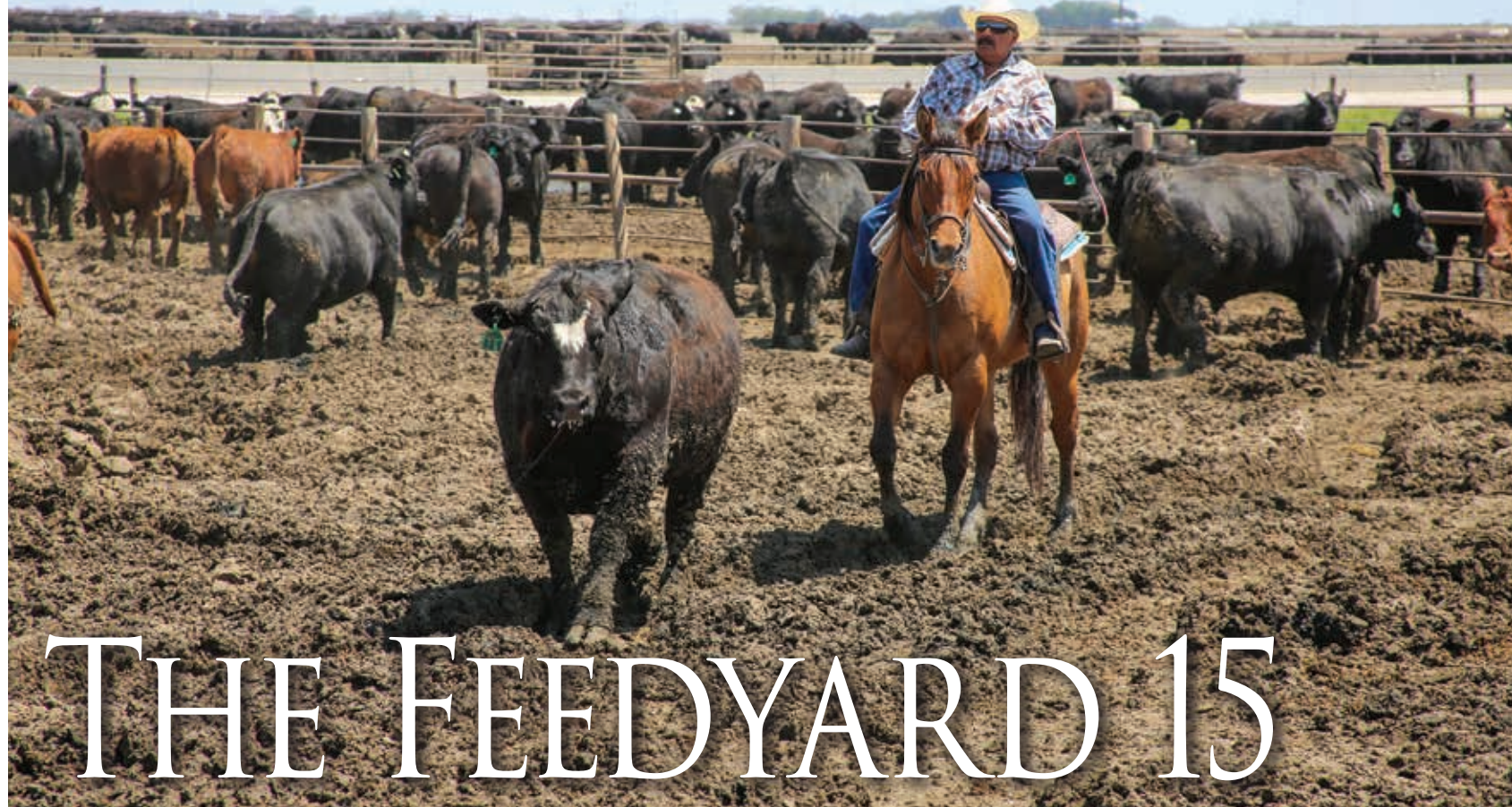


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THE FEEDYARD 15

Setting a gold standard for feedyard employee safety.

by Troy Smith, field editor

As the old saying goes, “Good help is hard to find.” It’s also hard to keep. In a competitive industry like cattle feeding, where conscientious managers continually strive to improve efficiencies, a high employee turnover rate can be a significant hindrance. It’s one of the things that can cause fretful nights for plenty of feedyard operators.

A desire to be involved in agriculture, to get outside and to work with cattle attracts many people to feedyard employment. However, there are some risks associated with those same attributes. The incidence of job-related injury tends to be high, and injury can remove people from the feedyard workforce temporarily or even permanently.

Or is it the other way around? Is high employee turnover at least partially to blame for high rates of injury among feedyard personnel?

There was a time many feedyard

employees were farm- or ranch-raised. Often, they came to a job with some practical experience. While growing up, they had been exposed to livestock or machinery, or both. They were aware of the potential dangers associated with handling animals and operating machines. That has changed.

Now, many new feedyard hires have little or no ag-related experience, and no understanding of the risks that exist. A good many are immigrants, and most have had no previous safety training related to their new jobs.

So, if a feedyard’s employee turnover is high and the workforce includes many inexperienced workers, it follows that workplace accidents could be more common — and they are.

Accidents happen

According to Aaron Yoder, a University of Nebraska biological systems engineer assigned to the Central States Center for Ag Safety and Health (CS-CASH), there is ample cause to really work at improving the occupational safety and health of feedyard workers.

According to Yoder, agriculture has the highest occupational fatality rate in the United States. Work-related deaths among beef cattle industry workers is 116 for every 100,000 — four times higher than for all ag sectors overall, and 34 times higher than the rate for all U.S. industries combined.

The non-fatal injury and illness rate is particularly high for the cattle-feeding sector. The “days away from work” rate for feedyard employees is two and a half times higher than for all industries combined. It’s a burden for feedyards.

“Labor represents a major part of production costs, and high workers’ compensation premiums add to the costs,” says Yoder. “There is increasing recognition that reducing injuries and illnesses among workers is a critical part of retaining a skilled workforce, decreasing losses and improving the sustainability of the operation.”

Safety training

The CS-CASH and its collaborators launched a project aimed at reducing the high injury rates and the associated costs by developing safety training programs. Input from feedyard managers would indicate many welcome opportunities to initiate

or strengthen safety training.

Yoder says feedyard safety practices and preferences were explored by surveying operations in the seven-state region (Kansas, Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, Minnesota, South Dakota and North Dakota) served by CS-CASH. Participating were 28 feedyards with capacities ranging from 1,000 to 32,000 head. About 82% of those feedyards indicated they provided training to new employees — typically hands-on training — but few had a staff position dedicated to job and safety training.

According to survey results, feedyard personnel facing the highest risk of injury were those working directly with animals, including employees working horseback and workers who handled cattle during receiving, processing and shipping.

The next highest risk of injury was associated with operation of machinery.

Regardless of the type of work performed, the most frequent sources of injury were categorized as “slips, trips and falls.” Ranked from highest to lowest rate of incidence, resulting injuries were to leg/knee, back, arm/shoulder and hand/wrist.

Table 1: The Feedyard 15

1. Feedmill safety
2. Mobile equipment/autos
3. Tractor/loader
4. Cattle handling/stockmanship
5. Processing cattle
6. Horsemanship
7. Slips, trips and falls
8. ATVs/UTVs
9. Emergency response
10. Extreme weather
11. Chemical hazards
12. Machine shop hazards
13. Electrical hazards
14. Bunker silos and silage piles
15. Manure lagoons



“Labor represents a major part of production costs, and high workers’ compensation premiums add to the costs,” says Aaron Yoder.



A survey of 28 feedyards within a seven-state region indicated the second highest risk of injury was associated with operation of machinery.



“There is increasing recognition that reducing injuries and illnesses among workers is a critical part of retaining a skilled workforce, decreasing losses and improving the sustainability of the operation,” says Aaron Yoder.

Based on survey feedback and input from the insurance industry, plus health and safety experts, CS-CASH is developing resources feedyards can use to conduct employee safety training, providing the resources in both English and Spanish. Striving to produce a “gold standard” for training materials, the project targets 15 topics (see Table 1). These stem from concerns voiced by feedyard managers themselves and include areas of work where the associated tasks pose the greatest risk of injury.

According to Yoder, each training module will be tested by feedyards in the CS-CASH region. As this is written, five modules (feedmill safety; horsemanship; slips, trips & falls; ATVs/UTVs; and

bunker silos & silage piles) have been completed. More modules will be available soon.

“The completed modules are available to anyone who would like to test them for us. This requires them to sign up through the website or contact us by email. They will be required to share injury data and feedback on the modules during the testing phase,” explains Yoder. “Early next year, the modules will be available to anyone for use.”

Yoder says the project also aims to establish a commendation program structured around the 15 training module topics. It is recommended that users use each in turn, scheduling training sessions targeting a different topic each month. Upon completion of each module, both the employees and the feedyard would receive a certificate of completion. Commendation should help reduce the cost of insurance premiums, as well as reduce workers’ compensation claims.

For more information, contact Aaron Yoder at 402-552-7240 or aaron.yoder@unmc.edu. |

Editor’s note: Troy Smith is a freelance writer and cattleman from Sargent, Neb.