



Beef Talk

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Wrecks are not desirable. Vaccinate your calves.

The process of getting calves ready for market is not simple. In days past, calves generally were not handled or worked prior to shipping in the fall. Instead, they were gathered, sorted and hauled directly to the auction barn.

Calves would not be separated from their mothers prior to sale, and the bawling of freshly weaned calves echoed from the local sale barns. These calves did well, and many returned to the countryside for a more leisurely feeding period in smaller lots or pastures.

Today, the tables have turned. Many calves go directly to feedyards that aggressively feed calves. In many ways, this is a culmination of genetic selection for growth and the availability of reasonably priced feedgrains available in sufficient quantities to facilitate the operation of large feedyards.

Standing at the entrance of a large feedlot today, one would see a constant flow of tractor-trailers loaded with feed or loaded with calves, courtesy of a very efficient transportation system.

In terms of filling trucks with calves,

today's buyers do not have a few select orders that offer a premium. Today's buyers have a standard order that fills large pens in large feedlots with similar types of calves that are preconditioned for such an environment.

The bottom line is the need for preconditioned calves is now the norm, not the exception.

Our program

At the Dickinson Research Extension Center, in response to the recommendation of our local veterinarian and in preparation for this fall's shipping, the calves were vaccinated with a seven-way clostridial, including blackleg caused by *Clostridium chauvoei*; malignant edema caused by *C. septicum*; black disease caused by *C. novyi*; gas gangrene caused by *C. sordellii*; enterotoxemia

and enteritis caused by *C. perfringens* types B, C and D; and *Histophilus somni* (*Haemophilus somnus*).

The calves also received a five-way viral product at branding to protect against infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR), bovine viral diarrhea (BVD) types I and II, bovine respiratory syncytial virus (BRSV) and bovine parainfluenza-3 virus (PI₃).

The cost of these products was 76¢ for clostridial/somnus vaccine and \$1.86 for the five-way viral product. Two to eight weeks prior to weaning, a booster vaccine is administered for clostridial/somnus and the five-way viral.

At the same time as the booster vaccination, calves received their initial vaccination to protect against *Mannheimia haemolytica* (formerly *Pasteurella haemolytica*) at a cost of

\$2.32 per dose. The booster vaccinations cost 76¢ for clostridial/somnus vaccine and \$1.86 for the five-way viral product.

At weaning, the calves again will receive all three vaccinations at a cost of \$4.94. The calves would not need to be vaccinated at arrival at the feedlot because they should be fully prepared for the transition. The total cost for the vaccination program is \$12.50 per calf.

This is a fairly aggressive vaccination program, but these calves are heading to the feedlot. For every 100 calves in the feedlot, the death of one calf would be more costly than the price of an aggressive vaccination program.

In addition, the nature of many of these diseases, if ever encountered, seldom involves just one animal. The reality of an outbreak is that a significant number of calves will be sick. The lost performance, lost value on the rail and actual treatment costs combine to produce what most cattle producers call a wreck.

It's best to not go there, so vaccinate the calves.



Editor's Note: Addressing the past, present and future state of the beef cattle business, "Beef Talk" is a weekly column distributed by the North Dakota State University (NDSU) Agricultural Communication office. Ringwall is executive secretary of the NDBCIA, director of the Dickinson Research Extension Center and an NDSU Extension beef specialist. An archive of columns can be found at www.BeefTalk.com, and your comments are always welcome.