

Beef Talk **Cows should not be gift-wrapped**

by **KRIS RINGWALL**,
Extension beef specialist,
North Dakota State
University



Very few questions are ever asked by those planning to purchase replacement cows. Buyers often forget to ask even simple questions, such as “Are the cows vaccinated?” or “What vaccinations have the cows received?”

The history of a cow is perhaps more

important than the wrapping. When buying cows, the data trail and answers to questions regarding health protocol are the necessary ingredients for a productive herd.

When buying new cows for the herd, producers should explore, question and

insist on knowing their history. There are many reasons cows are sold, and buyers should know why.

Young cows or bred heifers actually may have been raised and bred for selling. Or, a producer may be downsizing herd numbers because a stocking rate change has necessitated this action.

Some producers make a general practice of culling older cows. These sales can allow the cows to move from tough environments to operations that have easier availability of feed, where these older cows can do quite well and their productive life can be lengthened.

Gift exchange, anyone?

So why are so many cows purchased with very little input or question about their history? In many cases, one could almost compare the sale of a cow to an invitation to a gift exchange. In preparing for the gift exchange, we immediately start to think about what we should purchase. We need to be careful so we do not spend more on the wrapping than the gift.

The real value of many gifts is confused with the ornate wrapping. If the gift exchange allows for the selection of the gift by the receiver, almost invariably the first gift picked will be the best wrapped. The excitement peaks as the gift is opened, but immediately crashes once the gift is exposed.

This is not unlike a cow sale. Excitement escalates as cows arrive in the ring. The auctioneer works the crowd for each nod of the head or twitch of the hand. All wait for the moment the auctioneer grants the right to buy the pen or the luxury of picking out the special cow(s). Once the bid is selected, the excitement is over until the ring is filled with cows again.

Buying cows doesn't have to be like going to a gift exchange. Ask questions to learn what comes with the cow before you buy. The production history is as important as the cow. If you buy new cows for your herd, as noted earlier, explore, question and insist on knowing their history. There should be nothing hidden. Be particularly leery if the cow has a bow on her back.

Unwelcome surprises

Why the fuss? Simply put, herd biosecurity.

Replacement females from a sale barn may not pose a threat to your herd's biosecurity; however, one cannot afford to bring health problems into an existing production herd.

Producers need to continue the high industry standards by controlling access to their herd. Cows that have not been inspected by a veterinarian should not be brought into the herd. In addition, the cows should be quarantined and evaluated for common transmittable diseases.

Cows sold by the Dickinson Research Extension Center do not come in a wrapped package. All cows, including

Buying cows doesn't have to be like going to a gift exchange. Ask questions to learn what comes with the cow before you buy.

those sold, are annually vaccinated for infectious bovine rhinotracheitis virus (BRV), bovine viral diarrhea (BVD) types 1 and 2, parainfluenza 3 (PI₃) virus, campylobacteriosis (vibriosis) and leptospirosis (five leptospira serovars).

The cows also are screened for persistent infection with BVD (PI-BVD) and Johne's disease and inspected for any evidence of eye or other health abnormalities. The herd also is involved with testing for bovine leukemia virus (BLV).

Additional vaccinations are given depending on the need, such as for calf scours, and all the cows would have received calf vaccinations as well. Cows should not be gift-wrapped, but if you do buy gift-wrapped cows, don't be surprised at what you get.

Ask questions and expect real answers. Your livelihood depends on it.



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.beef-talk.com, and your comments are always welcome.

Cow Health Protocol

NDSU Dickinson Research Extension Center

Annually vaccinated for:

- Infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR) virus
- Bovine viral diarrhea (BVD) types 1 and 2
- Parainfluenza 3 (PI₃) virus
- Campylobacteriosis (vibriosis)
- Leptospirosis (five leptospira serovars)

The herd is annually screened for:

- Persistent infection with BVD (PI-BVD)
- Johne's disease
- Evidence of eye or other health abnormalities
- Spot testing for bovine leukemia virus

(In addition to annual scours vaccination and individual vaccinations as a calf.)

SUBSCRIPTION REQUEST

Please enter my subscription for 12 issues of the *Angus Journal*®.

ANGUS
Journal

3201 Frederick Ave.
Saint Joseph, MO 64506-2997
(816) 383-5220
E-mail: lspire@angusjournal.com

\$50 for one year (U.S.)

\$80 for one year (Canada) (Payable in U.S. funds)

\$125 for one year (Foreign) (Payable in U.S. funds)

Name

Address

City

State

ZIP