

Prevention Must Become More Prevalent

by **KINDRA GORDON**, *field editor*

Stewardship and judicious use of animal health products were emphasized by John Davidson during an educational session on cattle health at the 2016 Cattle Industry Convention in San Diego, Calif. Davidson, a senior professional services veterinarian with Boehringer Ingelheim Vetmedica Inc., shared his remarks Jan. 28 in the Learning Lounge at the NCBA Trade Show area.

Davidson reported that the industry has had a 63% increase in dollars spent on injectable antibiotics used to treat bovine respiratory disease (BRD) between 2009 and 2014. In spite of that, statistics indicate death loss at the feedlot level is not declining, with BRD among the leading causes of death.

Regarding calf care, Davidson emphasized that all sectors of the cattle industry must do their part to ensure cattle health and a quality end product.

“Decisions and recommendations need to be made on the best available science. ... There’s a necessary integrity to this process,” Davidson said. He also acknowledged that segmentation in the beef business often causes calves to not be prepared, specifically when they move from the ranch to the feedlot. As an example, he cited the 2011 National Animal Health Monitoring System

(NAHMS) data indicating that only one in four calves arriving at a feedlot are vaccinated for the more common bacterial agents associated with respiratory disease.

He encouraged cow-calf producers to utilize pre-marketing practices such as introducing calves to bunk feeding, castration, dehorning and preconditioning vaccinations against leading pathogens such as *Mannheimia haemolytica* and bovine viral diarrhea (BVD). Davidson noted that these protocols have demonstrated increasing recognition as extremely or very effective by feedlot managers in reducing respiratory disease.

“We’ve got to do a better job of preventing and preparing cattle for the impending BRD exposure,” he said.

Davidson noted that during the last two decades several new “tremendous antibiotics to treat respiratory disease” have been brought to the marketplace. But

he posed the question: Will that trend of adding multiple new antibiotics to the marketplace continue for the next 15 years?

“I don’t think it will,” he answered. “We have to be stewards of what’s available and use them judiciously so these drugs don’t become less effective.”

He continued. “There are changes coming. The Veterinary Feed Directive (VFD) will be in place soon, and it’s likely there are not going to be new antibiotic products approved for the next

several years. So when you think about our current practices, we can be better stewards of treatment and prevention.”

As an example of becoming better stewards of animal health products, Davidson asked, “When’s the last time you read the product label? It’s probably been a long time. We are in the food business. We need to know about the products we’re using.”

Davidson encouraged the use of “evidence-based medicine (EBM)” across the industry. He provided this definition for EBM: the conscientious, explicit and judicious use of current best evidence in making decisions about the care of individual patients.

“We can apply evidence-based medicine to herd health protocols right now. We must use evidence-based medicine to guide health practices and become less reliant on antibiotics,” he said.

He added, “Rules for VFDs are coming and 10 years from now I believe we will appreciate having them in place. I think we must all agree they are needed. To be able to continue to use these drugs that are medically important, we must safeguard them.”

Going forward, Davidson noted that cattle producers’ relationship with a veterinarian is “an important one.”

“The concept of prevention must become more prevalent in our industry,” he added.

The American Association of Bovine Practitioners (AABP) has created a document titled *Drug Use Guidelines for Bovine Practice* to assist beef and dairy veterinarians in guiding appropriate, effective and legal drug use on cattle operations. Davidson encouraged producers to read it, as well as review it together with their veterinarian. The four-page pdf can be downloaded at: www.aabp.org/resources/aabp_guidelines/druguseguidelines_2015-4-8-1.pdf.

Lastly, Davidson acknowledged that legislation, regulation, media and “retailiation” are driving change within the cattle industry. He noted that retailiation is when retail companies demand certain animal care and health protocols, and called that the most rapid driver of change emerging.

To these factors, Davidson stressed, “Talk to the legislative leaders in your state. We need to ensure that our advocates in Washington, D.C., have the necessary science to continue to support our ability to do what we need to do — producing the safest and most wholesome food supply in the world.”



Editor’s Note: Kindra Gordon is a freelancer and cattlegirl from Whitewood, S.D. This article was written as part of Angus Media’s online coverage of the 2016 Cattle Industry Convention & NCBA Trade Show. For additional coverage, visit the Newsroom at www.4cattlemen.com.

