

Precondition Calves Prior to Sale

Todd Thrift shares ways to increase the likelihood of getting a return on the investment in preconditioning calves.

by
TROY SMITH

Todd Thrift can't promise that preconditioning calves prior to sale will make a rancher rich, but he showed how it could be profitable. Addressing cow-calf producers attending Range Beef Cow Symposium XXII in Mitchell, Neb., the University of Florida animal scientist said a preconditioning program, including vaccinations and weaning calves for 45 days, does add value and potential for premiums.

Thrift said the objective is to take calves through the weaning process and "get them eating and gaining weight." It should better establish their health status and reduce the incidence of subsequent sickness and loss.

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research data show it works.

Thrift said the downside is the cost. He called feed the biggest expense, accounting for 70%, 80% and sometimes 90% of the total cost. But there is potential for recovering all of it and more. Heavier payweights should result from calves putting on additional weight during the preconditioning period, but Thrift also cited data showing how preconditioning can reduce shrink at sale time. Additionally, the preconditioning period offers a glimpse of how calves are likely to perform in the feedyard.

Thrift admitted that preconditioning is not always profitable. It depends on cattle kind and quality, and the cost of feed, labor and management. Calves can be preconditioned in a drylot setting, utilizing mostly harvested feedstuffs, or on grazed forage with supplementation.

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Success may also hinge on how calves are marketed, with "special" preconditioned sales often offering the best potential. Third-party

verification of the preconditioning process can lend credibility, but Thrift believes most buyers take producers at their word. He cited potential for garnering premiums of \$1.50 to \$6 per hundredweight, noting that premiums typically decline during periods of high calf prices.

According to Thrift, preconditioning might be most profitable for calves that are thin or nutritionally challenged, such as calves coming out of a drought situation. One thing preconditioning cannot do, he warned, is turn a genetically inferior calf into a superior one.

Editor's Note: To see the PowerPoint that accompanied Thrift's presentation or to listen to the presentation, visit the newsroom at www.rangebeefcow.com, API's online meeting coverage site for this event. You can easily access all of API's meeting coverage and informational sites in the API Virtual Library, located online at www.api-virtuallibrary.com.

RETURN to the Angus Beef Bulletin EXTRA

This summary was featured in our Jan. 20 *Angus Beef Bulletin EXTRA*, which is an electronic supplement to the printed magazine. We print five editions of the magazine. The *EXTRA*, which is emailed to *EXTRA* subscribers on or near the 20th of each month, gives us a chance to bring you additional relevant information to help you make the most of your Angus genetics. The *EXTRA* is an opt-in subscription, meaning you have to sign up for it. Since we email the *EXTRA* to you, we do need your email address, but we respect the privacy of our subscribers, and we will not sell, rent or loan our subscriber list to third parties for email marketing. You have the right to unsubscribe at any time simply by emailing us at bulletinextra@angusbeefbulletin.com.



Take a peek at the January edition by visiting <http://bit.ly/ACeOVj> or scanning the embedded QR code with your smartphone. We think you will like the additional information provided in the *EXTRA*, and we invite you to share it with others so they can sign up as well.

Vaccination: What the Heck Am I Doing?

On the final day of Range Beef Cow Symposium XXII, veterinarian G.L. "Jerry" Stokka spoke out in defense of technologies used to enhance food production. A former extension veterinarian now with Pfizer Animal Health, Stokka said technology is too often portrayed in an unfavorable light.

"Technology is not a dirty word. It is not evil," stated Stokka. "The prudent use of technology is part of good stewardship."

Stokka said vaccines represent a valuable technology, but their use can be confusing. There are hundreds of different vaccines available, with multiple antigens and differing levels of effectiveness and safety. Veterinarians, said Stokka, serve a critical role in making recommendations based on individual herd objectives and assessment of risk for disease exposure and economic loss.

"There are three questions to consider when deciding whether vaccination is appropriate," emphasized Stokka. "Is it necessary? Is it effective? And is it safe to use?"

Likening vaccines to insurance, Stokka said vaccination is necessary when there is a reasonable expectation of exposure to disease and a resulting economic loss. Then it must be decided whether there is product capable of providing an acceptable level of protection. Finally, it must be decided whether the product is safe for all classes and ages of cattle, without excessive tissue or systemic reaction.

Stokka also emphasized the need to handle and administer vaccines properly. Exposure to extreme temperatures or direct sunlight will reduce efficacy. Mixing reconstituted vaccines incorrectly or shaking them violently may also have negative effects.

"Injection does not equate with vaccination," stated Stokka, emphasizing that proper dosage and placement of vaccines are important.

"And vaccination does not equate with immunization," he added, explaining how the animal's body must recognize that a vaccine has been introduced, activate the immune system and then initiate an



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immune response. Consequently, immunity is not immediate. It takes time.

Stokka advised producers to consult their veterinarians regarding types, timing and handling of vaccines.

— by Troy Smith