

# VETERINARY CALL



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## Husbandry and health

*The three most important aspects of animal husbandry are meeting nutritional needs, providing protection from weather extremes and mud, and controlling both internal and external parasites.*

Good health for all ages of cattle starts with meeting their nutritional needs. When forage is green and growing, cattle need little additional supplementation, with the exception of salt and possibly other minerals. However, when forage is dormant, cattle may need supplemental feeds that provide energy or protein to maintain their health and productivity. Growing cattle and cows nursing calves require a diet higher in nutrients than dry cows and mature bulls.

Cattle are well-adapted to live in a wide variety of environments. With acclimation, cattle can thrive in very hot or very cold environments; however, weather extremes can be harmful and even deadly.

In periods of very cold temperatures, cattle need protection from the wind and a dry place to rest. In periods of very hot conditions, particularly when heat and humidity are both high, cattle need some way to dissipate or avoid heat through air movement or shade. Mud causes a number of health problems because of stress, particularly in cold temperatures, and harbors disease-causing germs.

Once the nutritional and environmental needs of the herd are assured, another important

health concern is the prevention of severe parasite infestations. External parasites such as flies, ticks, lice and other insects can directly cause illness and discomfort. They can cause additional harm because of diseases they can carry. Calves and growing cattle are generally at greater risk of having severe problems due to internal parasites, commonly called worms. However, in some geographic areas and grazing situations, even adults can have health problems. Chemical insecticides and deworming products can be used in combination with grazing strategies that decrease cattle exposure to new generations of parasites hatching from eggs present in manure, decaying plants or other sources in the environment.

### Good start

The greatest risk of death or severe disease occurs at the time of birth. A difficult birth can cause a calf to die due to injuries or because it is not able to survive a cold or otherwise stressful birth environment.

Consider the genetic influences of calving ease when selecting heifers

and the bulls they are bred to in order to minimize the risk of calving difficulty. Developing heifers with a diet that allows them to achieve a size and weight that is compatible with delivering a healthy calf is also important.

Calves, because they are young and do not have a mature immune system, are susceptible to many diseases that rarely, if ever, cause problems for adults. Germs that cause scours are passed to young calves from the manure of other calves and adults. Mud and manure are excellent environments for scours-causing germs. Keeping young calves in as clean an environment as possible during the first 1 to 2 months of age is an essential part of a herd health strategy.

Herd health strategies to protect adult cattle include annual vaccinations, careful introduction of replacement females and bulls, and isolation from other cattle as much as practical. Working closely with your veterinarian to address the greatest risks faced by your herd is the key to a successful herd health strategy.



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