

Weaning 100 Percent of Your Calves

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Respiratory disease at weaning time costs the beef industry from \$250 million to \$1 billion. But often those large numbers have little meaning to the individual producer.

The loss of two calves out of 100 (2 percent death loss) at today's prices will be approximately a \$1,000 loss. Treating 30 of those calves (30 percent sickness rate) at approximately \$10/treatment, plus the cost associated with lack of feed intake and weight gain, can result in another \$600 drain on net profit.

Those conservative death loss and sickness figures translate into an additional expense of \$16 for every calf sold.

Reduction of those losses at weaning time is an important goal for every seed-stock or cow-calf producer who weans his own calves in a preconditioning, limit-feeding or retained ownership operation. Preparation prior to weaning calves by having a health management program in place is the most important factor that can minimize those losses. A health management program can be divided into three areas -the facilities, the cattle and the producer.

Facilities for weaning calves need not be elaborate, but they should be clean, be of adequate size, and have adequate bunk and drinking space. All old manure should be removed; this reduces amount of exposure to diseases spread through manure, such as coccidiosis. Cleaning or whitewashing the corral structure itself reduces spread of ringworm.

Weaned calves should have from 100-200 square feet of pen space per head, with at least 19 inches of bunk space. The bunks should be cleaned before new calves arrive and should be maintained so that old feed or moisture do not build up and cause calves to refuse to eat.

Waterers, one of the most important management items, are often overlooked. Weaned calves may not be accustomed to drinking from an automatic waterer or even from a tank. Waterers may need to be placed along the perimeter of the corral or have an overflow hose continually running so the sound of water will attract them to the source. Waterers should be cleaned regularly; automatic waterers as often as one time per week and larger tanks from once every two weeks to a month.

In addition, the squeeze chute and alleyways should be checked for needed repair and maintenance.

Once the facilities have been prepared, attention can be shifted to calves. All weaned calves should be considered as being at risk of developing respiratory disease or pneumonia, even those calves that are weaned on the ranch of origin.

Calves of this age are experiencing a declining amount of immunity to various disease-causing agents. This is immunity

greatest exposure and stress.

In many farm and ranch situations a pre-weaning program cannot be implemented and an alternative program must be developed. Vaccination of calves at the time of weaning is the next best alternative (see chart).

The best preventative program will not prevent all sick cattle. All cattle producers should recognize and be prepared to treat sick calves very early in the course of the disease. A specific treatment

Dr. Stokka's Vaccination Program

Pre-Weaning

1. 4-way viral respiratory (killed).
Revaccinate at weaning
- 4-way viral respiratory (modified live)
2. 4-way Clostridial
3. Ivermectin
4. Implant
5. Coccidiosis prevention

At-Weaning

1. 4-way viral respiratory (modified live).
Revaccinate in 7 days
- 4-way viral respiratory (modified live)
2. 4-way Clostridial
3. Ivermectin
4. Implant
5. Coccidiosis prevention

they received at birth from dams through colostrum. Yet, while this immunity is declining, they are going from an environment of low exposure to disease-causing agents to one of high exposure. They are also going through a change in diet, from one of milk and grass to one of harvested forages and grain.

Recognizing that these factors contribute to the risk means that health management programs should be designed to have an impact on those factors.

All health programs must begin with sound nutritional advice. Calves of this age and weight have high nutrient requirements, yet the majority of weaned calves will not consume enough feed to meet those requirements. The rations offered to calves must be nutrient dense and very palatable and include the trace minerals that are vital in the calf's ability to build immunity.

The health program should include a vaccination schedule. The schedule should indicate when to vaccinate, what products to use and route of administration. Vaccination of calves while still nursing the cow may be the most ideal time. This gives the calf time to build immunity to some of the disease-causing agents prior to the time of

schedule prepared with your veterinarian should be used to treat the common illnesses that occur. This schedule should include the drug of choice for the disease, the dosage, route of administration and the withdrawal time.

The most important part of any health management program is the producer, who is responsible for its implementation. Other activities, such as harvest and field work for off-farm jobs, will divert attention from the calves at a very important time. Therefore it is critical that certain people are responsible only for the health and welfare of the cattle. The people put in this position should be trained in all aspects of the health management program.

All aspects of any health management program should be continually evaluated. However, only with some form of record system can the program be measured. A simple system that records the specific products used for vaccination, identifies treated cattle, why they were treated and what product was used for treatment will provide important information. The specifics of the program may be evaluated daily, monthly, or from year to year.