

Consider All Aspects

Angus University presenter Kevin Hill talks adding value with management.

Story & photo by **Miranda Reiman**, Certified Angus Beef LLC

If you want to make more money in the cow-calf business, the options are simple, according to Kevin Hill of Merck Animal Health: Wean more calves, wean heavier calves or add more value. The technical services veterinarian presented an Angus University Workshop during the 2016 Angus Convention in Indianapolis, Ind., Nov. 5-7.

Weaning more animals means improving reproductive efficiency and health. Heavier calves start with improving genetics and continue with implants, nutrition and parasite control, he said.

“Buy better bulls,” Hill suggested. Spending \$1,000 more for a bull that will increase average weaning weight by 20 pounds (lb.) pays off. In one year alone, siring just 20 calves, that added weight more than offsets the increased purchase price. Bull cost per calf is actually \$3.10 less for “the more expensive” bull.

“It can pay off as long as you put in the right numbers,” he said, referencing improved expected progeny differences (EPDs).

History shows vaccinated calves fetch a premium at auction. Data from Superior Livestock Auction show a \$25-per-head advantage for those weaned in the Vac34 program (one round of shots two to four weeks prior to shipping), and \$55 per head for those weaned 45 days with a second round of shots using the Vac45 protocol.

However, that is not an automatic bonus.

“Adding value only works if you have great communication,” Hill said.

Merck’s “Herd Health Manager” app guides cattlemen and their veterinarians through a health plan, and then encourages them to print out a record that can convey the information along at marketing.

Part of the health discussion should also center around deworming. The majority



► Weaning more animals means improving reproductive efficiency and health. Heavier calves start with improving genetics and continue with implants, nutrition and parasite control, said Kevin Hill of Merck Animal Health. Hill was featured in the Dec. 19, 2016, episode of *The Angus Report*. To watch, click the photo above or turn your browser to <http://bit.ly/TAR-12-19-16>. The audio to his presentation is available at <http://bit.ly/AC16-Hill-audio>.

of cattlemen are using the products, but “only half of you are doing it right,” the veterinarian said.

Looking at fecal-egg-count studies on three different classes of dewormers shows resistance is building to some products. On average, there is anywhere from 50% to 80% re-infestation on cattle treated with pour-ons

or injectables, compared to a little more than 10% on those treated with oral dewormers.

“The bigger reason is we’re talking about two different molecules,” he said. The Ivermectin class of dewormers

has been very effective and heavily used for the past 30 or 40 years. Parasites are adapting. There’s only one way to find out if a herd is resistant.

“You have to go to your veterinarian and do some fecal testing to see if your deworming protection is working,” he said.

Still, all the efforts on health and genetics can’t stand on their own, Hill said. “The most important management skill to master for

health, product and profitability is nutrition.”

What those cows are getting throughout their lifecycle matters — to them and to their calves.

It’s important to test feed and to get professional help, he said.

“I don’t care how good of a cowman you are, you can’t look at a cow and tell if she’s got enough protein,” Hill said.

The idea of asking cows to “rough it out” is at odds with Mother Nature in most production systems. Protein and energy needs for a cow nearly double from the low to the high in a year’s time.

“If you’re not making adjustments to that cow during her production cycle in your nutrition, you’ve got gaps,” Hill said. “What we’re learning about the effect of those gaps is pretty important.”

There are costs beyond the traditional body condition score (BCS) and rebreeding problems, he said, noting University of Nebraska work on fetal programming.

Heifers from supplemented cows gained better, had a higher survival percentage and improved fertility later on in life. Their steer mates from supplemented cows gained better and had increased feedyard performance and carcass quality later on than those from cows without the added nutrition.

“Even things we can’t see immediately on the ranch have some long-term implications to offspring,” he said.

For additional coverage of the Angus Convention — including summaries, speaker presentations, photos, videos and more — visit the convention newsroom at www.angus.media/news/Angus-Convention. The PowerPoint and audio to Hill’s presentation are available there.



Editor’s Note: *Miranda Reiman is assistant director of industry information for Certified Angus Beef LLC.*