



Outside the Box

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Health management

Health management is one of the top three priorities as established by successful cow-calf producers in the Priorities First study released by the American Angus Association in January. Establishing an effective health management program requires a comprehensive evaluation of the vaccination strategy, nutrition protocols, emerging disease risks, employee training and education, and assuring excellent communication with the herd veterinarian.

Changing relationships

The relationship between producer and veterinarian has evolved from conversations based on the crisis of the day to a more comprehensive approach that incorporates the veterinarian into the team of herd advisors. Herd health decisions must be made in the context of the herd's marketing, nutritional and reproductive goals. The veterinarian left solely in the role of emergency service provider is underutilized and will have difficulty providing meaningful advice that advances the overall performance of the enterprise.

Communication in the beef industry is historically problematic. However, the conversation between cow-calf producer and veterinarian is too important to be left to chance. In fact, periodic meetings that include herd management, the veterinarian, financial advisor and other key service providers will yield significant benefits.

With the emergence of age, source and process verification as barriers to market entry, it becomes incumbent on managers to assure that best practices such as Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) techniques are implemented and that each and every employee is trained and understands the approved protocols as they relate to handling, processing and treating cattle.

Training is perhaps the most overlooked component of cow-calf management. Routine is the enemy of excellence, as poor habits, sloppy workmanship and eroding standards tend to occur when we slip into repetitive habits. For example, how effective are our vaccine storage, handling and administration procedures?

The next time you process a set of cattle, observe the process so you can answer the following questions:

- Were products stored in the correct environment and at the right temperature?

- During processing, were products kept out of direct sunlight and at recommended temperatures?
- Were syringes, needles and other equipment clean at the initiation of processing?
- Were the correct-sized needles utilized, and were needles changed at least each time the syringe was refilled?
- Was administration in accordance with label guidelines?
- Were records maintained on the group of cattle processed, the manufacturer, expiration dates, lot numbers, dosage and route of administration?

As our fathers all taught us, plowing straight requires that we look up occasionally and take stock of the horizon. Emerging market and trade trends strongly suggest that access to global, specialty and high-end consumer niches will require that food producers document implementation of best management practices, such as humane handling, quality assurance initiatives and other source and process verification protocols.

Training and education will be absolutely essential to successful implementation of these programs. Producers who fail to heed these signals will likely find themselves with fewer marketing options in the future.

Prevention possibilities

One of the old-time ranch hands who worked for our family faced each new

problem with these words: "It's always something!" So it is with animal disease. Despite our best efforts, a new strain of an old disease or an emerging pathogen always seems to pop up, darkening the doorstep of our herd health program.

Bovine viral diarrhea virus (BVD) has received considerable attention during the past several years. The disease has been estimated to result in approximately \$3 billion in annual losses to the U.S. cattle industry.

The issue of greatest concern is the presence of persistently infected (PI) animals that actively shed infective

organisms via saliva, nasal discharge, semen, urine and milk. One PI animal can create havoc in a herd as it sheds the virus without necessarily exhibiting outward symptoms. BVD can result in significant reductions in reproductive efficiency, primarily in the form of increased abortion rates.

Infected calves that are sold into stocker and feedyards may infect other calves with which they are commingled, resulting in higher

morbidity rates, poor rates of gain and diminished carcass performance. Because PI breeding cattle can be the source of infection, it is important that seedstock providers develop a plan to control BVD in their own herds. The National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) BVD Working Group suggests there are four components of a herd BVD control plan:

- Determine if BVD virus is present in the herd.
- Control and eliminate PI animals in the herd.

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