



Vet Call

► by **Bob Larson**, Kansas State University

Equipment

Beef cattle producers typically own several different types of animal health equipment. A few important considerations are obtaining good-quality equipment, focusing on cleanliness, and making sure that all equipment is well-maintained. Some common animal health equipment likely to be found on many ranches include portable squeeze chutes and handling facilities, scales to collect body weight, warming crates for calves born in cold conditions, artificial insemination (AI) supplies, calving chains and calf jacks for use in cases of calving difficulty, ear-tag pliers, tattoo pliers, castration and dehorning tools, and syringes and needles.

Reliability and cleanliness

While it is important to search for value when purchasing animal health equipment, equipment that breaks easily or that won't reliably perform its function is never a bargain, no matter what the purchase price. If high-priced equipment is needed only rarely, finding a source that can lease it on an as-needed basis may be preferable to purchasing. Buying needed supplies

and equipment from local sources has the advantages of convenience and knowing who will stand behind the equipment they sell. Online suppliers and large outlets have the advantage of a large inventory and wide selection. The best source for your equipment needs will depend on your geographic area and your priorities.

Keeping equipment clean is almost always good advice, but cleanliness for animal health equipment is especially important. Many types of equipment will come with manufacturers' recommendations for

cleaning, and it is always important to follow these directions. In general, washing with hot water, soap, and appropriate brushes or other utensils is usually a good place to start.

For some animal health equipment, it is recommended to use a disinfectant to remove germs once the item is clean of all dirt and other debris. It is important to recognize that disinfectants won't work in the presence of dirt, manure or blood, so a good cleaning is

always the first step. Because cleaning and disinfecting detergents can easily destroy the ability of vaccines to work effectively, thoroughly cleaning reusable syringes followed by boiling them in water will kill any germs on the equipment without leaving a residue that can harm vaccines. Needles should *not* be cleaned and reused. Instead use disposable needles. Always clean syringes between uses; it is important to not use a syringe for one product followed by another product without a thorough cleaning in between uses.

Previously used needles should never be used to withdraw vaccine from the bottle. This should only be done with a brand new needle to prevent contaminating the contents of the bottle. For rehydrating the freeze-dried portion of a modified-live-virus (MLV) vaccine with the provided liquid, ideally, a double-sided transfer needle should be used. If a transfer needle is not available, you should use a new needle and syringe.

There are diseases of cattle that can be spread by very small amounts of blood — even the trace of blood left on tattoo pliers, tagging instruments, castrating knives and injection needles. To help prevent the spread of anaplasmosis and bovine leukosis, instruments that contact blood should be rinsed or wiped off between uses to remove all traces of blood.

Maintenance and service instructions provided with new equipment should be followed to ensure that your equipment is ready to use when you need it. All equipment should be examined closely for signs of wear or problems that you can address, and to recognize when you need to send equipment to an expert for repair. Some equipment needs routine lubrication or sharpening, and having all the materials you need to keep your equipment in good working order is important. For items that may break during routine use, having at least one backup is probably a good idea.

Cleaning and maintaining animal health equipment are important considerations when implementing Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) protocols on your cattle operation. This includes proper care and use of syringes and needles to prevent injection-site problems, keeping animal handling equipment in good working condition to prevent bruising or injury, and having clean, reliable equipment for use when assisting difficult births or dealing with other health emergencies to ensure good animal care and welfare.

Animal health equipment is one of many considerations when providing good care for your cattle. Taking a little time to consider what equipment you need, how you will keep it clean, and the best methods to make sure it is well-maintained will serve you well as you go about the daily tasks of caring for your herd.

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Editor's Note: Bob Larson is professor of production medicine at Kansas State University.



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