

What a Feedlot Wants



PHOTO BY MICKY WILSON

Information and cooperation should begin before calves enter the yards.

by *Melissa Leander*

More producers are looking at performance after weaning. Whether you retain or share ownership, or sell to a cooperative cattle feeder, you want your cattle to live up to their potential. That means a two-way sharing of information, and it starts before your cattle leave the farm or ranch.

"The number one thing I'm interested in is if the calves have been vaccinated," Ryan Loseke says. The veterinarian and manager of Loseke Feedyards, near Columbus, Neb., is also interested in the specific products used.

He is not interested in calves with no health history. "I don't want to spend time doctoring or taking care of calves that didn't have those vaccines before coming in," Loseke says.

Gary Fike, Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) feedlot specialist, says every detail helps. "Every manager would like to know the health background of the calves they are bringing in," he says. "Most of them want to know every product given, and the processing and weaning dates if possible."

It's easy to tell when bad news arrives, and cattle feeders take note of the source.

"If calves are coming in bawling for their mamas because they haven't been weaned or vaccinated, then we could be in for a couple of labor-intensive days," Scott Mueller, manager of Samson Inc., Platte Center, Neb., says.

Preconditioning programs and proper nutrition prior to the feedlot phase help reduce the stress and health problems of cattle coming in, Paul Dykstra, CAB feedlot specialist, says. "Feeders don't want to buy nonvaccinated cattle at all, if they can help it; if they do buy them, they'll discount the price."

More information

Knowing prior nutrition is also important so the manager can read the reasons for cattle condition and behavior, Dykstra adds. "It affects the weigh-up and compensatory gain that the feedlot can expect to get from the cattle. Furthermore, a poor plane of nutrition at the start will likely result in lower quality grade and *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) acceptance rates," he says.

"Nutrition is such a regional thing, but I've seen it affect quality grade," Loseke agrees.

"Most CAB-licensed feedlots want cattle with a known history of quality genetics, too," Dykstra says. "Quality is factored into the purchase price of the cattle at the sale barn."

Loseke likes to know a little bit about the source cow herd, too. "I want calves coming from mamas that can produce a bigger-framed calf weighing 1,300 pounds (lb.), but quality is also important."

Feedlot managers can easily get the information they want from many producers. That makes for potential discounts if your cattle are backed by question marks.

"If we buy cattle straight from the producer, we discuss how they've handled their cattle, whether that's preconditioning, weaning or vaccinations," says Shelby Jones, veterinarian and manager of Ranger Feeders, Dighton, Kan. "If we buy cattle from the sale barn, we tell our order buyer to look

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for those management traits in cattle. We must have the cattle that are weaned at least 45 days, preferably 65 to 75 days, because of their greater ability to gain.”

Producers can market their calves as preconditioned or source-verified at certain sales, Fike says. “These can bring premiums and help communicate information to the next person in the production chain.”

To come full circle in the flow of information, feedlot managers also try to relay information from the packer.

“I send information back to producers who send us groups of cattle,” Loseke says. “It’s important for them to know the carcass and closeout information.”

Mueller provides that data, too. “We like to give information back to the producer based on closeouts, including average daily gain, cost of gain and feed efficiency,” he says. “That helps the producer look at carcass information and make improvements in genetics.”

Through CAB, these and other licensed feedlots have an advantage of easy access to

carcass data that can be sent on to producers in a concise report.

As feedlot managers become more cognizant of the need to share data with the ranch of origin, cow-calf producers are learning. Their first lesson is that sharing what they know on the front end helps cattle live up to their profit and information potential.

