

Customer Service Opportunity

Preconditioning program provides opportunity for results-driven customer service.

Calf preconditioning has returned more than healthy, high-performing cattle for an Illinois Angus breeder — it has changed the level of customer service he provides.

By encouraging his customers to participate in a Merial® SureHealth® feeder-calf sale at Carthage Livestock, Carthage, Ill., Mike McClelland of Panther Creek Ranch, Bowen, Ill., has built stronger relationships with his bull customers. This January will mark the sixth year for the sale, which in recent years has drawn between 1,400 and 1,600 calves — 800 to 1,000 of which are from McClelland customers.

“To help our customers, we encouraged them to take part in a sale that offered them a unique opportunity to market their calves,” McClelland explains. “And it worked. Offering a sale full of high-quality, healthy, black calves attracted quality buyers.”

All calves sold in this feeder-calf sale must be black-hided and certified through the preconditioning program.

“We chose to participate in the SureHealth program because we saw the premiums these calves were getting in Carthage, and it is a well-recognized program by the veterinarians who certify the calves and the buyers in the area,” McClelland explains.

Brent Lowderman of Carthage Livestock says this calf sale proves each year to be profitable for the producers.

“We hold several SureHealth calf sales each year, and they consistently average \$3 to \$5 per hundredweight over the market average,” Lowderman says. “However, because this sale consists of black-hided cattle, it attracts buyers who do not attend our other sales.”

McClelland agrees that the sale has drawn a good pool of repeat buyers willing to pay top dollar for his customers’ calves, and the benefits spill over to his operation. In fact, the first year after he encouraged his customers to participate in the calf sale, the average on his bull sale went up \$400.

“I attribute the growth in the sale to the preconditioning program, since we also use it on our cattle, and also to the opportunity it has created for us to work with our customers,” he explains.

Roger Crum is one of McClelland’s bull customers who has sold calves in the sale since its inception.

“Switching to this sale has proven to be a good decision, as my calves are now in a sale that has repeat buyers and is heavily promoted,” Crum explains. “Since I was already weaning my calves and selling them in January, moving to Mike’s sale was an easy decision, and our calves have sold well.”

Crum operates Prairie Vu Farms, La Harpe, Ill., a 75-cow commercial Angus operation. In addition to the calf sale, he has become a loyal McClelland bull customer.

“I used to buy bulls from Mike and several other people; however, for the last three years, I have only bought bulls from Mike,” Crum says. “He does a good job of helping market my calves through this sale, and using the SureHealth protocols has worked well for my operation. I can more consistently predict the health of my calves each year.”

Those protocols include parasite control with Ivomec® (ivermectin), two rounds of vaccinations, a 45-day weaning period and other best management practices (BMPs),

such as castration and dehorning.

Furthermore, it is the only nationwide, veterinarian-certified preconditioning program. The program uses only proven, branded products that are backed by two reputable animal health companies — Merial Limited and Boehringer Ingelheim Vetmedica Inc.

McClelland also uses these protocols on his calf crop annually.

“When we began using SureHealth, we only had to make minor modifications to our health program to meet the required protocols,” McClelland says. “It’s a solid program that helps us add value to our cattle because it’s backed by a 21-day limited health warranty. It also has helped us reduce sickness at weaning.”

Going the extra mile to use a certified preconditioning program on his cattle and participate in a calf sale has returned dividends for this Angus breeder. His cattle are healthier, he’s gained a quality touchpoint with his customers, and buyers return to both the bull and feeder sales because they know they’re getting quality cattle that have been prepared to hit the ground running.

McClelland says, “The SureHealth program has worked well for us and fit perfectly with what we were looking for — a program that would add health and marketability to our cattle and our customers’ cattle.”



Editor’s Note: This article and the accompanying sidebar were provided by Bader Rutter & Associates Inc. on behalf of its client Merial.

Second-generation Angus breeder

The McClelland family began in the Angus business in 1953 when Larry McClelland, Mike’s late father, purchased his first registered heifer. Mike says that when he was growing up, there was never a doubt in his mind that he wanted to be involved in the family operation. Now, he and his wife, Kati, operate the ranch with his mother, Karol, and his brother-in-law and sister, Steve and Valerie Peterson.

“All I ever wanted to do was work with cattle,” he explains. “This isn’t just our business, it’s our life.”

For that reason, McClelland strives to find new ways to improve

and market their cattle and offer top-notch customer service. Panther Creek Ranch now houses about 300 females — almost all of which are registered Angus. The family hosts a production sale in the spring, selling about 60 bulls and 75 females. McClelland keeps between 70 and 90 females back as replacements each year.

The ranch has both spring- and fall-calving cows. McClelland artificially inseminates (AIs) his heifers and 30% of the cows and purchases high-quality herd bulls to advance his genetics.

In addition, the McClelland family farms about 1,400 acres of row crops and 300 acres of hay.