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Getting Calves Through Weaning, Relocation and Started on Feed

Michigan State University

Cooperative Extension Service

Michigan Beef Production

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Getting Calves Through Weaning, Relocation and Started on Feed

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Getting beef calves through the stress of weaning, transit, sale, change in ownership, and started on feed represents an important time for the cow-calf producer as well as the cattle feeder. Research in recent years has raised serious questions about the economic feasibility of preconditioning programs. Nevertheless, for those producers and feeders who feel that certain management practices fit their enterprise, the following tips are offered as guidelines. Regardless of the situation, consult a veterinarian for the diagnosis and prevention programs designed to combat disease problems that are specific to your local area or region.

Pre-Weaning

(Approximately 1 Month Before Weaning)

1. Performing as many practices while the calves are still on the cow will minimize stress when they are weaned.
2. Castrate and dehorn.
3. Vaccinations: *
 - a. IBR modified live vaccine
 - b. PI₃ modified live vaccine
 - c. BVD killed vaccine

- d. Haemophilus somnus killed vaccine
- e. Clostridial 7-way killed vaccine
- f. Pasteurella haemolytica modified live vaccine
- g. BRSV modified live vaccine
- h. Brucellosis vaccination for replacement heifers, 4 to 8 months of age (This is a Michigan law.)
- i. Lepto 5-strain killed vaccine (for replacement heifers)
- j. Vibrio killed vaccine (for replacement heifers)

**(NOTE: Several of the above vaccines are available in combinations, requiring fewer injections. Items b through g are optional.)*

4. Grub and lice control.
5. Deworm (optional).
6. Get calves used to eating some grain so they will more easily adjust to a feedlot environment. Note, however, that cattle feeders will discount calves that are too fleshy. Therefore, unlimited creep feeding of small-framed, early-maturing calves is not advisable.

Weaning Time

1. Booster vaccinations for replacement heifers (except for Brucellosis and pasteurella).
2. Booster vaccinations for calves that are going through a total pre-weaning/preconditioning program and will be sold later.
3. For calves being sold directly off the cow, it is important that the stress of weaning and sale be kept to a minimum.
 - a. Clean, comfortable hauling conditions
 - b. Minimum time spent on truck
 - c. Minimum time spent in sale yards
 - d. Clean, fresh feed and water

At the Feedlot

Health Practices

1. When possible, try to receive cattle during daylight hours. Inspect cattle on arrival for sickness and injury.
2. Receiving pens should be sufficient in number to avoid mixing loads of cattle. Mixing new cattle with acclimated cattle may increase incidence of respiratory disease.

3. Process within 24 hours after arrival. Every 24-hour delay in processing increases sickness rate by 1 percent.

4. Handle quietly in groups small enough to avoid having calves in the treatment area longer than 45 minutes.

5. Identify with legible ear tags to help detect sick calves.

6. Even if calves were processed at their point of origin, it is recommended that the following vaccinations be carried out: *

- a. IBR modified live vaccine
- b. PI3 modified live vaccine
- c. BVD killed vaccine
- d. Haemophilus somnus killed vaccine
- e. Clostridial 7-way killed vaccine
- f. BRSV modified live vaccine

*(NOTE: Items b through f are optional.)

7. Grub and lice control (depending upon time of year and history).

8. Deworm (depending upon origin - consult veterinarian concerning the best products to use).

9. Implant with growth stimulant.

10. Do not shut calves in poorly ventilated buildings. Calves have fewer respiratory problems if left outside with a dry bed underneath them.

11. Check cattle two or three times daily for sickness. Remove, treat and isolate cattle that are obviously ill. Early detection and treatment is critical in order to minimize death loss.

12. Know how to detect sick cattle. Symptoms include:

- Failure to come to feedbunk; standing alone
- Slow gait; knuckling over of fetlocks
- Drooping ears
- Extended head
- Dry red nose
- Heavy nasal discharge
- Increased respiratory rate; heavy breathing

13. Plan of action for treating sick calves (MSU Beef Cattle Research Center):

- a. Record rectal temperature; treat and isolate those with temperature of 103.5° F or higher.
- b. Switch antibiotics if improvement is not seen in 48 hours.
- c. Treat for a minimum of 3 days and a maximum of 9 days.
- d. Administer a vitamin B₁₂ injection to cattle not eating well for longer than 7 days.

14. If sickness rate is high, mass medication of *all* calves may prove beneficial. In Oklahoma research, treatment with LA-200 and long-acting sulfa decreased morbidity

from 33 to 14 percent, and reduced death loss cost from \$22 to \$15 per head.

Starting on Feed

1. Start cattle on top quality grass or mixed grass-legume hay.

2. Feed starting ration on second day by sprinkling on top of hay. Gradually decrease hay and increase starting ration until desired level is reached.

3. Keep feeding times consistent to avoid digestive upset.

4. To maximize intake, keep bunks clean of manure, stale feed, silage trash, etc.

5. Until calves are 600 pounds, make at least 50 percent of the supplemental protein a preformed protein. After calves reach 600 pounds, NPN can be used as sole source of supplementation.

6. According to a 21-trial research summary, feeding AS-700 for 3-4 weeks tends to improve weight gain and reduce morbidity.

7. If coccidiosis is apt to be a problem, add anticoccidials to the diet (Rumensin, Bovatec, Deccox, Corid, etc.).



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