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FEEDYARD MANAGEMENT: FIVE STEPS TO A BETTER RECEIVING PROCESS

The receiving process — one of the most important aspects of feeding cattle — provides the feedyard with the opportunity to start cattle correctly, with the goal of achieving the highest possible margin. All the decisions in the feedyard should be made with the idea of maximizing the health of the rumen and immune system of these cattle. To achieve maximized production, everyone in the feedyard must work as a team to improve the processing procedures for animal handling, feeding and health.

Step 1: REDUCE CATTLE STRESS

Wade Nichols, Ph.D., with Merck Animal Health, says that because stress influences the release of biological and physiological factors within the body that are detrimental to improving rumen function and health, all cattle handling should be conducted with cattle well-being and comfort as primary concerns.

"A good sign of low-stress cattle handling is a kink in the cattle's tails, along with an overall calmness when returning to their home pen. If cattle have their heads down and are slobbering, then your cattle-handling procedures need improvement," says Dr. Nichols.

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> – Wade Nichols, Ph.D., Merck Animal Health

Step 2: ADMINISTER THE APPROPRIATE VACCINES AND ANTIBIOTICS

The processing vaccination procedures for receiving cattle are highly variable and depend on the source of cattle, evaluation of health risk, time of year, and age of the cattle.

"All cattle feeders understand the devastating effects that bovine respiratory disease (BRD) can have on a pen of cattle. For this reason, the use of a proven modified-live viral vaccine, such as Vista®, is critical in the receiving process to reduce the possibility of a catastrophic loss due to BRD and other diseases," says Dr. Nichols. "In some sets of calves, the consulting veterinarian will recommend a variety of other vaccines to cover other health concerns."

In addition to vaccines, feedyard managers also will need to work with a veterinarian to make a decision on the use of antibiotics. For those cattle that are deemed to be high-risk, the use of a metaphylaxis treatment with an antibiotic may be advisable. Dr. Nichols says the use of an antibiotic should be considered with several aspects in mind, including efficacy, length of duration, cattle source and cost.

Step 3: DEVELOP A DEWORMING PROGRAM

One aspect that is taken for granted in the receiving process is the use of anthelmintics. Several studies have data to prove the effectiveness of using Safe-Guard® (fenbendazole) with an avermectin concomitantly. Dr. Nichols says this procedure improves feedyard performance in cattle and has been shown to improve marbling and the overall health of the pen of cattle.

Step 4: IMPLEMENT AN IMPLANT PROGRAM

Dr. Nichols says that an implant program is undoubtedly the most important factor for improving margin in cattle. Before cattle arrive at a feedyard, managers need to decide if they want to implement an aggressive strategy or a more conservative strategy.

"The more aggressive strategies improve growth and feedyard performance to a greater degree but require more management by the feedyard. This strategy utilizes the high-priced feed rations of today more efficiently by improving growth and reducing cost of gain. However, the feedyard needs to understand that the cattle will need to be finished to their physiological end-points to achieve the grade they might expect," says Dr. Nichols. "A more conservative strategy will elicit less of a growth response and will not reduce cost of gain quite as much, but it will allow for cattle to finish at lighter weights and can be more forgiving if cattle are sold early due to market demands."

While feedyard managers should consult their herd nutritionists to determine the best implant program for their herd, Dr. Nichols suggests Revalor®-XS (trenbolone acetate and estradiol) for an all-around implant strategy to improve performance and maintain grade across a wide variety of feeding and selling options without the need to re-implant cattle.

Step 5: IMPROVE FEEDING AND BUNK MANAGEMENT

Proper feeding and bunk management is key to increasing margin by starting cattle correctly and thereby improving rumen function and immune system health. Dr. Nichols says that consulting nutritionists are extremely beneficial in this process. They should be utilized to develop a receiving ration protocol that factors in long stem hay at arrival, accessible water, available feedstuffs for the receiving ration, and management capabilities.

"One aspect that is typically overlooked in the feedyard is the feedmill and delivery of the feed," says Dr. Nichols. "It is critical that the feedmill and delivery mechanisms hit their prescribed tolerances for making and delivering feed. If the mill cannot make or deliver what the nutritionist prescribes, feedyard managers run the risk of feeding an unbalanced ration and having miscalculated costs of feed delivered due to commodity pricing errors."

"While cattle can vary by origin and degrees of health, there are several steps feedyard managers can take to improve the receiving process," says Dr. Nichols. "Reducing cattle stress through better animal-handling management, administering a BRD vaccination and proper antibiotics, establishing a solid implant and deworming program, and improving feeding and bunk management, all play a role in improving rumen health and immune system function of the cattle to increase margin in all cattle at a feedyard."

Safe-Guard: Cattle must not be slaughtered within 8 days following last treatment. For dairy cattle, the milk discard time is zero hours. A withdrawal period has not been established for this product in pre-ruminating calves. Do not use in calves to be processed for veal.

A withdrawal period has not been established for Revalor in pre-ruminating calves. Do not use in calves to be processed for veal. For complete information, refer to product label.

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