

4 Reasons Preconditioning Makes 'Cents'

Cow/calf producers can add significant value by implementing a preconditioning program, which can pay off all the way through to the feedlot.

In times of high cattle prices, it's not uncommon for producers to want to capitalize on prices as quickly as possible. And, it's no different for this year's valuable calf crop. Producers are gearing up to cash in on their investment in producing and raising a healthy calf, but there are a few reasons to slow down and evaluate if this is the most profitable path. Could waiting a few months longer realize additional payoff?

"Preconditioning calves is one way that a farm or ranch can

really add value, whether those cattle are staying on the farm or moving into a stocker or feedlot scenario," says Chris Forcherio, Ph.D., beef research manager at the Purina Animal Nutrition Center. "The producer implementing a preconditioning program may receive a higher premium, and no matter where the calf goes after that, the opportunity for improved health and performance should be adding value from that program."

Preconditioning, which commonly includes a vaccination,

nutritional and management program to help calves through a stressful timeframe, can be an investment, but it can be an investment with potentially bigger payoffs down the road. Here are four reasons preconditioning makes 'cents':

1

Improved health

As many producers know, weaning can be a very stressful time



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for calves. Stress may cause them to go off feed, become immunocompromised and more susceptible to disease or can even result in death.

“Calves that are preconditioned with an effective vaccination program and started on a high-quality nutrition program may be better equipped to handle this period of stress,” Forcherio says.

Research shows that preconditioned calves may have a significant reduction in treatment costs, as much as \$29.50 per head, as well as a 3.1% lower mortality rate in comparison to non-preconditioned calves. Investing in animal health with preconditioning can help cattle get through a stressful period, meaning potentially less treatment cost and more calves down the road.

2

Additional weight gain and increased feed efficiency

Calves that have gone through a preconditioning program (45 days or more) and sold at a later date will have added weight versus calves that are sold at weaning. Additionally, research shows that calves that have gone through preconditioning have 7.2% better feed efficiency.

Another study shows that preconditioning can add up to \$61 per head to the value of heifers or \$11.04 per cwt. to the initial weaning weight.

3

Seasonal market payoff

Preconditioning may also provide an opportunity to sell calves in a more favorable market. In many instances, spring-born calves are weaned in October and are either sold at that point, or they are preconditioned

to be marketed roughly 45 days later in November or December. Seasonal price indicators show that it may be more profitable to wait for higher prices in November or December but that prices vary based on market scenarios.

“Market prices for cattle can really fluctuate, and it’s important to have tabs on the market value at any given time, in comparison to what you’ll be investing in a preconditioning program,” Forcherio says. “Cattle producers should always have a goal in place before starting a program.”

4

Management premium

Despite the additional costs of vaccination and nutrition, research shows that conservatively preconditioning may capture \$50 to \$75 per head of additional value. Whether a producer keeps the set of calves on his operation for further development, or is looking to sell those calves to a stocker or feedlot operation, this added value can mean potential profit in the form of healthier animals and the resulting premiums.

When cattlemen are considering a preconditioning program, there are several critical management elements to keep



According to Chris Forcherio, Purina Animal Nutrition, calves that are preconditioned with an effective vaccination program and started on a high-quality nutrition program may be better equipped to handle the stressors at weaning time.

in mind. They should make sure preconditioned calves are acquainted with feed bunks and water troughs. Fresh, clean water should be offered at all times. In addition, calves should be offered a high-quality, balanced diet with the appropriate amount of energy, protein, minerals and vitamins.

A variety of Purina® Animal Nutrition products are available to available to precondition cattle and get them off to a great start, including Accuration®, Precon® and Stress Care 5™ starters and supplements. These products are all part of the Purina Great Starts® calf feeding program. **HW**

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