

Managing for Treatment Success

While preventing disease in the cattle herd should be the top priority, it is not always possible to avoid all illness. If an animal does get sick, there are steps that can be taken to improve treatment success. The primary focus should be on making sure the animal gets well with the first treatment because the likelihood of changing disease outcome with a second or third treatment is low. For this reason, additional attention, best management practices and most efficacious products should be focused on the initial treatment.

“Maximizing success with the first treatment helps to minimize treatment cost and reduce the likelihood of a chronic animal,” says Robin Falkner, DVM, Pfizer Animal Health veterinarian from Christiana, Tenn. “You cannot realistically avoid a poor economic outcome when two or more treatments are required. Animals that don’t respond to the first treatment have a high probability of becoming a dead or chronic, and most of them

have permanent lung damage that compromises future performance.”

According to a recent study, animals that required retreating (two or more treatments) for bovine respiratory disease (BRD) returned \$184 per head less than those animals that required only one treatment for BRD, demonstrating the importance of managing to improve first-treatment success.

Falkner shared these tips on how producers can improve first-treatment success rates:

- **Timely identification:** Identifying a sick animal immediately is vital to the success of any treatment plan.
- **Effective treatment:** Use of the most effective means of treatment available will greatly decrease the likelihood of treatment failure. The difference in cost between the least efficacious and the most efficacious product is not large enough to justify the risk of treatment failure and the additional costs (additional treatment cost and reduced

performance) associated with it. The high cost of treatment failure more than justifies the small difference in the cost of treatment options.

- **Environment:** For any treatment to be successful, the environment needs to be conducive to healing and recovery. The hospital pen should provide the cleanest and driest conditions available, while offering plenty of space for the animal to heal.
- **Bio-containment:** Ensuring your hospital pen doesn’t become a system that inoculates common diseases into sick animals is critical to treatment success. The hospital pen should contain and eliminate problem diseases, not collect and inoculate them. Remaining conscious of bio-containment within the hospital pen will reduce the spread of disease into other animals that would have otherwise not been exposed.
- **People:** Identifying and treating

sick animals is an art. It is also a unique skill. Employees must be trained to effectively identify and treat a sick animal. Improper identification of sick animals can lead to the filling of a hospital pen with cattle that do not need to be treated, thus exposing those cattle to the pathogens that are causing sickness. The training and managing of employees are equally important and should not be neglected.

The driving focus for any cattle producer should be on reducing the number of animals that become sick through the use of sound prevention and control programs. Falkner says this reduction starts with the type of animal purchased, the techniques used for handling the cattle, and the arrival health program the cattle receive. Once animals are sick, Falkner emphasizes, proper identification, treatment and handling are integral to a successful first-treatment program. By focusing on first-treatment success, one can lower the number of sick animals in a herd and the overall economic cost of disease. **HW**