

Feeder Calf Marketing

Tips for adding value.

by Sara Gugelmeyer

producer goes the extra mile in hopes of ensuring a higher price than what the average commodity calf crop will bring, but sometimes incurs added cost and risk. This producer must also always be on the lookout for premium programs and special markets into which his cattle will fit. It doesn't matter which approach you take as long as it works for you.

If you are looking for ways to add value here are some tips:

1. Change up your marketing plan

Willard Wolf, former American Hereford Association fieldmen, now a cattle broker based out of Spokane, Wash., says, "Many producers are extremely traditional in their marketing patterns. Sometimes, I think more than they need to be."

Avoid selling your calves during times when everyone else is selling, usually September – November. This change may require your feeding them longer than the traditional preconditioning phase. In this case, be sure the higher price will pay for the added feed cost. Consider a fall-calving season if feed resources can support it.

2. Produce a uniform calf crop

Buyers will pay more for uniformity. A short breeding season is essential for calves to be the same size at weaning. Also closely monitoring for and culling

cows that wean light calves will help, as well. Wolf suggests having a flexible marketing window of about six months in which producers can sell if they feel the price is right, or be able to comfortably wait for the price to become right. "But you have to have those resources and contacts available to market at various windows and you have to plan for it. This all takes considerable planning through the marketing period."

3. Find ways to make a sizeable sale lot

Sale lot size is also important. If you don't have a large enough lot to make a load, consider combining lots with another producer whose calves are of similar type and size. Avoid single lots totally; studies show even a lot as small at 10-15 head will bring a much better price than a single.

4. Sell the healthiest calves possible

Work closely with your veterinarian to develop a health plan that will work for you. Be sure to sort off anything that could be perceived as unhealthy to avoid discounts.

Wolf says it's important to "remember your cattle are your reputation, so anything that is going to cost you shrink or delay on sale day is hurting your reputation for coming marketing years." And remember to explore your options because sometimes trying new and innovative methods will be more than worth the effort.

See Page 47 for a list of *Hereford World* articles and online resources regarding feeder calf marketing. **HW**

When it comes right down to it, there are two ways to approach feeder calf marketing. The first is to raise a commodity product with costs as low as possible and sell it at the sale barn for a commodity price. This puts you at the mercy of the market. When feeder calf prices are high and your costs are low, you reap the benefits. Otherwise, there is little you can do.

The other approach is to raise a calf crop that is special in some way. Maybe they are source-verified; maybe they are 100% Hereford and Hereford-influenced. Maybe they are eligible for natural programs. In this approach, the