

Cattle Deserve a Professional Herd-health Program

Vaccinate because cattle immunity is a good thing. As cattle producers start to think about working all those calves that are on the ground, herd health is a priority.

The initial key to a good herd-health program is to develop a good working relationship with the local veterinarian and implement appropriate herd health practices. More than likely, an early point to a herd-health conversation regarding good herd health is herd biosecurity. In other words, keep the cattle and calving facilities neat and clean to prohibit the proliferation of disease-causing pathogens from the get-go.

Proper waste management is a must, along with facilities that are adequately bedded and drained. Spring is always a good time to evaluate lot and pasture conditions and do something about those problem areas. Fill in the wet spots, and perhaps some mound development would be good, too.

All in all, keeping your facilities up to par will go a long way toward minimizing health issues. Once the facilities are clean and well-managed, there are two more points to consider.

Do not overcrowd your facilities and do not introduce new animals that have not been adequately isolated and inspected by a veterinarian. By limiting overcrowding, stress is reduced. By properly isolating new arrivals, the potential introduction of a disease-causing pathogen is reduced.

Improve immunity

Once the herd-health program is implemented, a producer should ask the next question of the veterinarian: "How do I improve individual cattle immunity within the herd

because we realize that some cattle diseases have been present in the region?" Establishing immunity to local cattle diseases is a supplement to the herd-health program and provides insurance that, when a particular cattle disease is present, the incidence of the disease within the herd will be lowered.

Immunity is established through exposure to a disease or developing an effective vaccination program prior to the herd being exposed to a disease. Keep in mind that vaccinations are not always available, practical or effective. However, when an effective vaccine is available, implementing a vaccination program prior to a disease outbreak is cost effective and less stressful, and it improves appropriate immunity within the cows, bulls and calves.

In many ways, the concept of immunity is extremely complicated, but you actually can come to accept the concept that immunity, in the big sense, is just one process. That is the process of cattle building up within their body armies that are designed to defend the body from an invasion of foreign entities. These armies may be rather generic or very, very specific. They routinely may cleanse the body of foreign entities or may lie in wait until a very specific disease arrives, and then the army is called into action and, we hope, will conquer the disease-causing invader.

Vaccinate

How do we do that? We vaccinate. Vaccinate the herd with available vaccines on a yearly basis, and initiate a calf vaccination program as soon as practical. Do all of this within an overall herd-health program that has professional input through the local

veterinarian and implements an excellent biosecurity program.

Herd-health programs may not be easy to maintain because herd exposure to neighboring herds occurs, bad weather arrives, visitors visit and we all like to travel. The world is a busy and interactive place. This is tough, but using common sense to restrict access and limiting pass-through visits helps keep the cattle less exposed. Use good sanitation and put boots and other protective gear on when a visitor comes to review the herd.

Try to implement a process where once an animal leaves the herd, the animal does not come back. New animals always should be quarantined under veterinary supervision. As noted earlier, boost the herd with appropriately designed vaccination programs to help back up the biosecurity measures.

Protect your investment

Yes, resistance to change is strong, but the dollars invested in a beef herd are large. In fact, producers would have a hard time remembering when the value of cattle and the associated investment to maintain those cattle were this great. The cost of implementing adequate biosecurity measures and associated vaccination protocols is minimal, compared with the cost of even losing one calf, let alone a cow or bull.

The new calf crop is on the ground, so develop a strong working relationship with your veterinarian and ask questions. Your uniqueness and cattle herd deserve a professionally designed herd-health program. The program will pay well.

May you find all your ear tags. **HW**