



“We precondition and source- and age-verify our calves because we’re doing what the feedlots want.”

— Chuck Kohlbeck

The Customer Is Always RIGHT

Taking customers’ needs to heart enhances Montana Hereford breeder’s operation.

by Wendy Mayo

When Chuck and Kathy Kohlbeck decided to return to the family’s Hereford seedstock operation in 1981, they knew they would need to make a few updates to ensure its success and longevity.

“We eliminated some things we used to do, such as selling 2-year-old bulls,” Kohlbeck says. “I don’t know anyone who can afford to keep 2-year-old bulls anymore. Now, we have a quicker turnaround because we only market yearling bulls.”

But that wasn’t the only change at Storey Hereford Ranch in Bozeman, Mont. Kohlbeck says

they took another look at the bulls they had been keeping, reducing the number of bull calves by 60% to ensure they are raising only the best. And, they changed from horned to polled Herefords to suit their customers’ and the industry’s changing desires and needs.

In fact, Kohlbeck relies on frequent feedback from his commercial customers. This helps him gauge customer needs and price points. The result is Kohlbeck can help buyers select bulls that will fit into their individual operations and budgets.

“We have worked with these guys enough — and they’ve worked with us enough — that they believe in our product,” Kohlbeck says. “We rigidly

cull for a lot of things. Our buyers want bulls they can keep for four or five years — or longer — to get their investment back.”

But, Kohlbeck says, his bull buyers weren’t the only ones influencing his marketing decisions. It also was important to listen to his feedlot customers.

“We precondition and source- and age-verify our calves because we’re doing what the feedlots want,” Kohlbeck says. “It was an easy decision. It’s another 25 cents a pound for us when we sell those calves. Getting into a good health program and good vaccine program, especially from branding on, pays for itself.”

Additionally, fitting SelectVAC®, a documented preconditioning program, into his current herd health plan was a simple transition because he and his veterinarian were already vaccinating and deworming all of the Kohlbecks’ cattle.

“You have a list of things to vaccinate for through the program and you just make sure you follow that list, so SelectVAC is really easy

to follow,” Kohlbeck says. “We sell our calves at a Hereford-influence sale, and we’ve sold our calves at the top of the sale since it started because we do the age and source verification and preconditioning through SelectVAC.”

In the nearly 10 years they have been preconditioning their calves, they have never had a report of one calf being pulled or sick.

“That’s why these guys are willing to pay a few more cents per pound for our cattle,” Kohlbeck says. “They know they’re healthy.”

Gerald Stokka, DVM, veterinary operations, Pfizer Animal Health, agrees.

“Calf preconditioning is one of the most demonstrated ways producers can add value to their animals and market healthier calves,” Stokka says. “And, sellers aren’t the only ones who can reap the preconditioning rewards — buyers also can profit from purchasing preconditioned calves.”

In fact, Stokka says, buyers can expect to see reduced health risk, lower treatment costs, less labor and handling, and less stress from preconditioned calves.

“Calves that were preconditioned following the WeanVAC® designation through SelectVAC were four times less likely to get sick than calves with an unknown health history and gained 36 lb. more in the first 85 days on feed,” Stokka says.

When choosing a preconditioning program, Stokka says producers should look for highly credible programs with third-party verification.

“SelectVAC is a well-known preconditioning program with established credibility, quality products and an excellent track record,” Stokka says.

Kohlbeck says preconditioning calves through the SelectVAC program just makes good sense when it comes to marketing their feeder calves.

“It’s really simple,” he says. “From what we have seen when we watch the Superior Livestock sales, someone says, ‘These cattle have been through the SelectVAC program,’ and the price goes up.” **HW**



A good health program, as well as backgrounding calves before marketing, yields more dollars for the Kohlbecks.



Storey Hereford Ranch now markets yearling Hereford bulls.

