

Nutrition Edition

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*A detailed preconditioning and vaccination program will help maximize feedlot performance.

Above Average

Herefords in this Texas feedyard performed well in conversion and gain.

by *Larry Stalcup*

When calves were weaned last fall, Drew Pérez and his family chose to place some in the feedyard to help measure their performance and to spread out their financial risk. The cattle — sired by their purebred Hereford bulls — didn't disappoint.

The finished cattle were sold on the cash market April 1, a few days before the market dropped by \$3 per cwt. They were shipped April 14 at an average weight of 1,352 lb. They had been placed at an average of 766 lb. Their overall average daily gain was 3.75 lb. after 156 days on feed. Their dry matter conversion was 5.68 lb. of feed to every pound of gain. Those numbers will work every time.

"These cattle had an above average gain and a better than average conversion rate," says Robby Kirkland, co-owner of Kirkland Feed Yard in Vega, Texas, where the Pérez family has fed out several pens. "They performed really well."

That was good news to Drew and other members of Pérez Cattle Co., which has been in operation since 1993 in northeastern New Mexico outside Nara Visa. That's when Drew's parents, Michael and Connie Pérez, bought a commercial cow herd from Connie's parents and leased the ranch. They currently run about 800 commercial and 150 registered cows in the Sandhill region. They have an annual bull sale in February. Their goal is to raise superior baldies.



Drew Pérez (r) experienced success with his Hereford-sired calves at Kirkland Feed Yard with the feedyard's co-owner, Robby Kirkland (l).

Drew has a degree in agricultural economics from Texas Tech University and is a portfolio manager for AgTexas in Amarillo, a major ag lender. His brother, Kyle, has a degree in animal science from Kansas State University. All family members are involved in the program, which often sees them sell calves over the Superior Livestock Auction.



“But in the last two years we’ve fed-out some cattle,” Drew says. “We wanted to experience their performance at the feedyard. We wanted to test key herd bulls in a commercial setting. For this last group, we AI’d (artificially inseminated) some of our commercial Angus cows to our top Hereford herd bulls. Their calves were the majority of the cattle sent to the feedyard.

This type of process helps us feel more comfortable with people who buy our cattle because we know they will perform well. It’s your reputation on the line,” he explains.

While measuring genetic performance is important, risk management also plays a part. “Any time you can spread out your risk it helps,” Drew says. “With all of the volatility we’ve seen in calf prices, it just makes sense to spread your risk over a period of time.

“If cattle have been backgrounded right and have good Hereford genetics, it can allow you to be more flexible with your risk management by feeding them out. You know the expected out date. If you know you won’t face any hiccups, you can place risk management on them six months in advance.”

Preconditioning pays

The Pérez family takes no chances with the threat of disease, parasites and other situations that can harm cattle health and performance. Before heading to the feedyard, the cattle were on a detailed preconditioning and vaccination program.

“We normally follow the vaccination protocol used in the Superior VAC 34 program,” Drew says. “All calves are vaccinated against BVD and respiratory diseases and internal and external parasites.”

Calves are vaccinated while on cows several weeks prior to shipping. The shots include:

- Two doses of 7-way, 8-way or 9-way Clostridial at branding and two to four weeks prior to shipping.
- One dose of a viral 5-way (IBR, PI₃, BRSV and BVD Type I and II) two to four weeks prior to shipping. The IBR and PI₃ components are either chemically altered modified live or modified live with a veterinarian’s approval. The BVD and BRSV can be either modified live or killed.
- One dose of Mannheimia Haemolytica and/or Mannheimia Multocida two to four weeks prior to shipping.
- An internal and external parasite control injection.

Kirkland agrees a good preconditioning and vaccination program is essential when cattle leave the ranch. “The vaccinations are needed to help get the cattle ready for a confined environment that’s much different than a ranch setting,” he says.

“A typical feedyard handles all types of cattle that are shipped here from independent ranches across the country, sale barns and other environments,” Kirkland explains. “By being vaccinated, we hope the cattle become immunized if and when they are challenged by potential diseases that are part of cattle confinement. We hope they can fight off any disease or stress pressure they meet.”

Kirkland likes to see calves weaned 45 to 60 days before being shipped to the feedyard. “Calves need time to allow their immune system to be strong,” he says. “A 45-day program is good. Sixty days is that much better. A three-week weaning program is probably not long enough for many calves.”

Drew adds, “The best way to mess up good genetics is to not have a good vaccination and preconditioning program. You need to give the cattle the best opportunity to succeed beyond your ranch at the next level.”

Along with calves, producers should consider a well-planned cow vaccination program. Veterinarians recommend a modified live virus vaccine program be used 30 to 60 days prebreeding to control BVD and other respiratory and reproductive diseases in heifers and cows. The vaccine will help promote more timely breeding. It will help maintain a shorter calving season. Above all it will help produce better colostrum for calves and prevent diseases in calves.

“I firmly believe that when you vaccinate a cow, she’s going to pass the immunization on to the calf,” Kirkland says. “We’ve seen less disease pressure on calves from mothers that were also vaccinated.”

Herefords have maintained their share of bunks at Kirkland Feed Yard. It has been in operation since 1983. Robby’s father, Perry, started the feedyard. Its total feeding capacity is about 22,000



Pérez cattle undergo a detailed preconditioning and vaccination program to ensure performance and health before arriving at the feedyard.

head. “We’ve been fortunate that we’ve seen a lot of Hereford and Hereford-cross cattle come through here,” Kirkland says. “We have three specific customers that all focus on Hereford production.

“We see solid performance from Hereford-influenced cattle. They gain well and it’s normally a positive feeding experience for our customers. Their strong growth rate helps improve the breakeven down the road. I’ve marketed some on the Certified Hereford Beef (CHB®) program, and they’ve done well.”

Drew says it is important for Pérez Cattle Co. customers to know that cattle bred from their genetics will perform. “We know that 50% of the cattle born will be females and many will become replacement heifers,” he says.

“The other half will be males that will usually go to stocker and feeding operations. It’s important for our customers to capitalize on both sides of the equation. And it’s important for our family ranch to know we’re

sending great cattle to our customers.” **HW**

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