

Prepare for Progress

Implementing weaning and preconditioning programs can increase profitability and efficiency.



Jack Ward is the executive vice president of the American Hereford Association. He can be reached at jward@hereford.org.

Summer is moving right along, and many of you are starting to think about weaning the spring-born 2019 calves. This is an exciting time, yet it can also be one of the most stressful times for producers, calves and their dams. In an article emphasizing the impact of the weaning and preconditioning processes, a veterinarian stated, "If we properly prepare animals for the next phase of their life it will be much better for their health, their well-being and for production."

Strategize

Many of us have a variety of goals for our weaned calves. For the seedstock producer, some weaned calves are kept as replacements, some are kept as bulls and marketed to commercial producers, and a group will be moved to the feeding industry through retained ownership or marketed through feeder sales. No matter the final goal, weaning is a stressful time in a calf's life. Using management techniques to reduce stress can improve calf growth and performance and the animal's ability to adapt to new environments.

There are many considerations for a proper weaning, including vaccination protocols, weaning

methods (fenceline, nose flaps, etc.) and nutrition. A good nutrition program can help support growth and performance of calves during the preconditioning period. During this time, calves transition from a milk diet high in energy, protein, and vitamins and minerals, which must be replaced with high quality feedstuffs for proper nutrient intake. This new high quality diet contributes to improved immune function and reduced weaning sickness. The first 30 to 45 days post-weaning are important for performance and health and will set the stage for efficiency and profitability in the feedlot or a productive life in a cow herd.

Even though the most vital part of weaning is associated with the calf, it is also an important period for the dams of these calves. The cows have been focusing on milk production in order to properly grow and to provide for the calves, which is especially true as we have put pressure on genetics for more weaning weight. Postweaning, a cow can begin to gain back some body condition and get herself in shape for the next calving season. The cow's ability to recapture flesh postweaning is extremely critical in tough drought conditions.

Producer payoff

Finally, we must consider the pressure on the producers. Producers work hard to get cows pregnant and to get calves on the ground. But, the final paycheck comes when the calves hit the marketplace. Each stage of a calf's growth and development is imperative to the profitability of a farm or ranch.

Producers should always be driven by net return, but sometimes this is hard to visualize. For instance, if a producer is doing a good job of preconditioning a set of calves and markets them at weaning, he or she may get discouraged as that individual sees other groups of calves receive a similar price but have not done all of the extras. However, there will be advantages in weight and in performance when the calves hit the feeding sector, which resonate well with buyers for future sales. In addition, a good weaning and preconditioning program will always add productivity and longevity to an operation's retained female group.

Bottomline, producers must implement a good vaccination protocol, weaning technique and nutrition program in order to see profitability and to "prepare animals for the next phase of their lives." **HW**



Contacts

American Hereford Association

Address:
11500 N. Ambassador Dr., Ste. 410
Kansas City, MO 64153
816-842-3757 • Fax 816-243-1314
hworld@hereford.org • Hereford.org

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Director of commercial programs
Trey Befort, tbeafort@herefordbeef.org

Director of youth activities
Amy Cowan, acowan@hereford.org

National shows coordinator and youth activities assistant
Bailey Clanton, bclanton@hereford.org

Records supervisor
Tena Martin, tmartin@hereford.org

Education coordinator
Laura Loschke, lloschke@hereford.org

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Amari Seiferman
aseiferman@herefordbeef.org

Regional brand managers
Donald Lucero, dlucero@herefordbeef.org
Ty Ragsdale, tragsdale@herefordbeef.org

Director of marketing and communications
Kaylen Alexander, kalexander@hereford.org

Executive assistant
Anne Stuart, astuart@hereford.org

For information about marketing Hereford-influenced feeder cattle or about the Hereford Verified program, call Trey Befort at 816-842-3758 or visit HerefordFeederCattle.com.

Member Cattle Registration Fees

Age of calf	Regular	Electronic
Up to 4 months	\$12.50	\$10.50
4-8 months	\$18.50	\$15.50
8-12 months	\$25.50	\$20.50
More than 12 months	\$50.50	\$50.50

Hereford World Staff

Director of field management and seedstock marketing
Joe Rickabaugh, jrick@hereford.org

Production manager
Caryn Vaught, cvaught@hereford.org

Editor
Diane Meyer, dmeyer@hereford.org

Editorial assistant
Kayla Jennings, kjennings@hereford.org

Advertising coordinator
Alison Marx, amarx@hereford.org

Creative Services coordinator
Samantha Albers, salbers@hereford.org

Editorial designer/assistant
Christy Benigno

Graphic designers
Sharon Blank and Teri Wolfgang

Production assistant
Debbie Rush

Contributing writers
Adrian Austin, Crystal Avila, Nicole Richardson, Troy Smith and Heather Smith Thomas



Commercial Advertising Representative
Jay Carlson, Carlson Media Group LLC
913-967-9085, jay@carlsonmediagroup.com

Field Staff

Western Region – Jared Patterson
Ariz., Calif., Idaho, Nev., Ore., Utah and Wash.
411 E. Mountain View Ln., Burley, ID 83318
208-312-2386, jpatterson@hereford.org

Mountain Region – Lander Nicodemus
Colo., Mont., Wyo. and western Canadian provinces
947 Rd. 146, Burns, WY 82053
307-421-8141, lnicodem304@gmail.com

North Central Region – contact Joe Rickabaugh
Kan., Minn., Neb., N.D. and S.D.
11500 N. Ambassador Dr., Ste. 410,
Kansas City, MO 64153
785-633-3188, jrick@hereford.org

Upper Midwest Region – John Meents
Ill., Ind., Ky., Md., Mich., Ohio, Pa., W.Va. and Wis.
21555 S.R. 698, Jenera, OH 45841
419-306-7480, jmeents@hereford.org

Southwest Region – Colton Pratz
Ark., La., N.M., Okla. and Texas
6074 Monte Vista Ln., Apt. 1718,
Ft. Worth, TX 76132
817-992-7059, jcshereford@gmail.com

Eastern Region – Tommy Coley
Ala., Fla., Ga., Miss., N.C., S.C., Tenn. and Va.
1284 Stage Coach Rd., Sewanee, TN 37375
815-988-7051, tcoley@hereford.org

Central Region – Joe Rickabaugh
Iowa and Mo.
11500 N. Ambassador Dr., Ste. 410,
Kansas City, MO 64153
785-633-3188, jrick@hereford.org

Northeast Region – Contact the AHA
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