

by **Trey Befort**

In December, another year of the American Hereford Association's (AHA) two feedout programs kicked off at HRC Feed Yards in Scott City, Kan. This year marks the fifth National Junior Hereford Association (NJHA) Fed Steer Shootout and the second AHA Hereford Feedout Program. Both programs provide participants with great opportunities to learn about the risks and rewards of the cattle feeding industry. Participants also receive valuable information about the genetic merit of their cattle entries.

Entries for the Fed Steer Shootout came in at 133 head from 41 NJHA members in 15 states. Participation for this year's Hereford Feedout Program came in at 162 steers from 11 producers in eight states. I commend the youth and adult producer participants for their efforts to send cattle from across the country to participate in these programs, and we look forward to developing a great educational experience for all involved.

### Healthy cattle advantage

With a few years of these feedout programs under our belt, we can study the data for insights on enhancing quality and increasing profitability. An important topic to review is the effect of animal health on performance and profitability.

In a feedout program review webinar held Sept. 23, 2020, we looked at the effects of health on the performance of NJHA Fed Steer Shootout cattle throughout the first four years of the program. (A recording of the webinar is available on [Hereford.org/commercial/programs/resources](https://www.hereford.org/commercial/programs/resources).)

The accompanying graphs compare performance and value of cattle treated for illnesses compared to healthy, untreated cattle. As you can see, healthy cattle averaged 37 pounds heavier at harvest, had 34 pounds of additional hot carcass weight, nearly one point more of dressing percentage and brought \$70 more per head in carcass value.

These documented advantages of healthy cattle in the feedyard are

great examples of the importance of a solid vaccination program. If you are retaining ownership in your calf crop through harvest, health protocols translate into real dollars to increase profits. If you market your calf crop as calves or yearlings, it is still critical to provide healthy cattle to the marketplace, as it could be the difference in having repeat buyers and consistent demand for your cattle.

### Pick your protocol

It may seem obvious that healthier cattle perform better and have increased value, but there are many producers who have not implemented a good vaccination program to set cattle up for success when they head to a backgrounding or feedyard environment.

As we get into calving season and start preparing for spring vaccinations, it is a great time to put a plan in place. Consulting your veterinarian is always a great place to start, as there are many differences in health needs for cattle

located in the various geographical regions around the country.

There are several great vaccination protocols available. Turn to Page 76 to review the various value-added health programs identified by Superior Livestock Auction (SLA) in the article "Value-Added Premiums \$50 Per Head, Data Show."

Producers interested in participating in the Hereford Advantage feeder cattle marketing program are also required to give cattle a minimum of two rounds of vaccinations preweaning. Find more information about participating in this program and vaccination protocol recommendations at [HerefordAdvantage.com](https://www.herefordadvantage.com).

Regardless of what protocol you follow, the bottom line is a vaccination program can return great value and improve the marketability and performance of your cattle. **HW**

Trey Befort is the director of commercial programs for the American Hereford Association. He can be reached at [tbefort@herefordbeef.org](mailto:tbefort@herefordbeef.org).

