What factors impact feeder calf value?

by Rachel Endecott

What makes an ideal feeder calf? Feedlots often have a wish list of factors for which they are willing to pay a little more. In this month’s newsletter, we’ll discuss a few of those factors.

Most cattle feeders would agree that they prefer a calf who has been weaned from its dam for a period of time. One of the most common periods of time used for a weaning program is 45 days (about 6 weeks).

Why do feeders prefer weaned calves? Weaning is the most stressful time of a calf’s life and stress makes calves (and people) more likely to get sick. When calves are sick, they don’t grow and gain weight as well as healthy calves. Feedyard managers would much rather have the original owner take on the risk of sick calves after weaning than have that risk themselves.

A second factor impacting calf value is also related to calf health - vaccination history. Many feedlots prefer that calves have at least two rounds of vaccinations (around 1-2 months of age and before weaning). The most common vaccinations are for clostridial and respiratory diseases.
Another factor that can impact feeder calf value is whether or not the feedyard knows the history of the calves. This can be two-fold; first, the seller should supply potential buyers with information about the history of the calves (age, breed composition, vaccination program) and secondly, if the buyer knows the seller and their calf quality from previous interactions, they may be more or less likely to bid on those calves based on those previous interactions.

Feeders may also wish for calves to be in uniform groups, not be overfat, and have some knowledge about how to eat out of a bunk and drink out of a water tank.

A whole host of factors can impact the value of feeder calves. What can you do as a producer of beef cattle do to ensure your calves are high on the feedyard's wish list?

Top 10 Tips for Effective Vaccination

1. Read and follow label directions. If you are unsure, consult your veterinarian or call the vaccine company before using the product.
2. Follow proper Beef Quality Assurance guidelines.
3. Sterilize equipment between uses. Modified-live vaccines are sensitive to disinfectants, so do not use chemical disinfectants in syringes or needles for modified-live vaccine use.
4. Refrigerate and store vaccines as directed on the label. Be sure appropriate temperatures for the vaccine are maintained when they are away from the refrigerator.
5. Keep vaccines out of sunlight, even when in the syringe.
6. Mark syringes to avoid mixing or incorrect dosage.
7. Mix only enough vaccine to be used in one hour or less.
8. Choose correct needles for the job, and replace often.
9. Keep records of vaccinations used.
10. Good sanitation, management and nutritional practices are necessary to achieve the best results from vaccination programs.