From the Cradle to the Table - Beef Programming

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My topic is entitled "From the Cradle to the Table." This involves the ideal of each cow producing a calf each year, and the growth and development of this calf through the feedlot to the table of the beef consumer. My practice tip involves the establishment of a program to insure that as many cows as possible produce a calf each year and develop this calf to beef.

In setting up a program with the livestock producer, remember that any program that involves excessive gathering and handling of the cow herd will meet resistance from the beginning. Labor is expensive and most livestock producers are "short-handed" when it comes to labor. The alternative is to plan the working and program to coincide with the normal working and handling of the cow herd. In our country the calves are weaned and sold in the fall of the year. This is a good time to start a program. We can pregnancy check the cows and control grubs and lice at this working. The open cow is fatter at this time of the year and it saves the expense of carrying an open cow during the winter, which is the most expensive time of the year to maintain a cow.

The next time the cattle are normally gathered is in the spring of the year. The new calves are branded and vaccinated and it is an ideal time to set a vaccination program in motion. We know the conception rate of the herd from previous fall's palpation. If a breeding problem due to Vibriosis, Leptospirosis, IBR, or other disease is present, now is the time to vaccinate the cow before breeding for the year. We can also determine if additional feed or energy is required to insure proper ovulation and conception. We also use an injection of Vitamin A at this time.

If any major problem is apparent at either working, the livestock producer will gladly gather the cow herd at your request to instigate a treatment or preventive program. Beef cattle programming is simply stated as a systemic method of handling the beef cow herd. This allows the veterinarian to evaluate the program constantly, and to make changes as necessary to maintain a productive cow herd.

We have briefly discussed the cradle portion of this topic. We now need to look at the calf from birth to the table. One of the major problems we face is calf scours. In our beef herds this is a particular problem in first and second calf heifers. In the past, we have had positive conformation of IBR, BVD, and P13 viruses in calves that developed scours within 24-hours of birth. Vaccination of the cow before breeding with IBR, BVD, P13 has eliminated the problem in every herd we have on a herd health program. At the present time we recommend vaccinating before breeding the heifer the first time. We repeat the following year, then every other year as long as the cow remains in the herd.

Our results in trying to control this calf scour problem in unvaccinated herds are variable. We have tried serums, Reo Virus oral vaccine, antibiotics, and fluids. Our best results have followed the use of a milk replacer using the following formula. One bottle of 500cc of 50% Dextrose, 20cc of Vitamin B Complex, one teaspoon salt, and one tablespoon of baking soda. This is Q.S. to one gallon with water. This mixture is given at the rate of one pint every two to three hours until the gallon has been given. We use a systemic and an oral antibiotic with this formula.

The next major step in the calf's life is castration, dehorning and vaccination for the Clostridium species at around three months of age.

Many livestock producers now wean their calves and go to the feedlot after weaning. Some are now marketing a 1100 pound steer at 12 to 14 months of age. We as veterinarians can help insure this program to be a success. Some methods of accomplishing this and the reasons for these are as follows. Begin creep feeding the calves a feedlot starter ration before weaning. This will teach the calf to eat out of a trough and at the same time it will adapt the calf to urea which is a part of any feeding program. At weaning the calf will be on a familiar feed and we will eliminate one of the stresses of weaning on the calf. We have better results vaccinating the calves for the bovine respiratory complex on the day of weaning. I feel

that the additional stress of vaccination at this time does not greatly affect the calf. To delay the vaccination for the bovine respiratory complex at this time results in an additional stress period when the calves are vaccinated. This plus the fact that some of the calves will be in the incubation stage of the disease will give variable results to the program. The calves can be put on feed and raised to the second feedlot ration. This will permit dropping back one ration upon moving to the feedlot, which will help reduce the new stress to the calf.

This is just one possible disposition of the calf by the livestock producer. Others sell their calves for grazing or feeding purposes to others. Always encourage true pre-conditioning at every opportunity. Even if a calf just knows how to eat out of a trough, it makes our handling of stocker cattle much easier. Calves properly vaccinated for the bovine respiratory complex and Clostridium species should be a part of any cow-calf program. The proper control of internal and external parasites and the weaning of the calf and teaching it to eat and drink should be accomplished before it ever leaves the farm or ranch. People to a large extent are creatures of habit, so to speak. In the past, cattle were gathered and shipped and the buyer assumed all of the responsibilities mentioned above. Sickness and death losses under this program ran into the millions of dollars yearly. Now we are beginning to see a change in the marketing and handling of calves. More producers are beginning to pre-condition their calves before they sell them. It should be part of our duties as consultants to encourage these procedures and make them become a routine habit. The results will be apparent to all who work with stocker and feedlot cattle.

In conclusion let me stress these points. Work with the livestock producer. Plan your program to coincide with the normal handling of the cattle. Encourage pride of ownership and pride in delivering a superior product. Begin a simple program and add to it as it becomes necessary. Many of my programs began as pregnancy testing of the cows each fall. As conditions change, we are able to show the producer why we should go forward and add other parts to our herd health program. Above all, work with the livestock producer and tackle the problems together.

Improving Reproductive Performance of the Three-Year-Old Beef Heifer

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1. Weaning weight — 650 lb. - weaning wt. = lbs. till breeding. Lbs. till breeding ÷ days till breeding = lb. per day gain.
2. Keep all heifers for replacements.
3. Provide adequate numbers of tested bulls.
4. Breed for only 20 to 30 days.
5. Pregnancy check all heifers 45 to 60 days after breeding season is over.
   a. Tax advantage
   b. Conception rates
      1. Hereford 45-55%
      2. Hereford X Angus 65-70%
      3. Hereford X Angus X S.H. 75 to 80%.
6. At least 100 lb. gain last trimester.
7. Breed to calve 60 days earlier than cows.
8. Calve under confinement conditions.
   a. Control nutrition
   b. Assistance at any time
   c. Cleanliness
   d. Medication