

# Thoughts on Preconditioning

Harry Reddick, D. V.M.  
Dos Palos, California

For a practice tip this year I want to convey some ideas, rather than describe a specific treatment or procedure.

For many years we have heard a great deal concerning pre-conditioning. I would like to discuss my ideas concerning pre-conditioning as it pertains to feedlot cattle. Any time we talk about pre-conditioning we must also include words such as reputation, misrepresentation, and salvage. In theory, pre-conditioning is excellent; in practice it doesn't work so well. Perhaps the name should be changed to reputation. Pre-conditioning implies something extra. The name "reputation" implies nothing more than good management practices. Cattle with a reputation for doing a good job in a feedlot need no certificate to guarantee their worth the next time around. Cattle with a good reputation will command the top dollar each year. During times of feeder cattle shortages this is not too important, but on a buyers' market all of the good management practices will still be well compensated.

To produce reputation cattle we must start with the correct dam and sire. Nutrition, plus parasite and disease prevention and control are also important, not only a short time before selling, but right from the beginning. Most men vaccinate their cattle at branding time for diseases that are important to them, but few vaccinate for diseases that are important to the future buyer. This must be changed. If I get only one thought across today, it is this: vaccinate calves for IBR. You can include P13 also, but the most important disease to feedlot men is IBR. You can sell this idea to the producer by telling him what value it will be to him, such as

improved conception rate, fewer abortions, fewer neonatal deaths, and a reduced incidence of pinkeye. If your client is already vaccinating for Lepto, it is not too difficult to switch him to a combination vaccine. Feeder cattle need all the help they can get, especially when they are purchased on the east coast, are gathered, sorted, and then shipped, arriving on the west coast a week later.

Even with all of this, if they are normal, healthy animals when they leave home, they can usually withstand this stress if they have protection against IBR.

We veterinarians must take a more active responsibility of rejecting, on arrival at our feedlots, all forms of rank misrepresentation such as injured cattle, the sick cattle, and the dead or dying cattle. By the same token, we should not pass on our own mistakes by sending our salvage cases to the nearest auction yard.

If pre-conditioning is ever going to really work, we must improve all other areas of beef production. No one associated with the beef industry can complain about the shortages unless we first stop the great losses that take place from conception to the dinner table.

There are many areas of veterinary medicine today, such as companion animal medicine, laboratory animal medicine, and so forth. In food animal medicine, I thought that my sole objective was to make money for my clients, but I now know that the most important responsibility of our entire profession is to help provide the world with an adequate supply of good, wholesome milk and meat.