Herd Health Directly Affects Beef Cattle Profit

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The value of cattle today is great, at least for the live ones. Or should I say healthy ones? What makes one calf healthy and another calf unhealthy is an ongoing question. The scientific data give the actual details but do not explain why one calf and not another.

Data have indicated the value of cross breeding, or hybrid vigor, which provides a broader selection of genes available from an increased genetic pool. In addition, a gene from different parentage, when paired up on the chromosome, seems to be stronger in the genetic outcome versus when paired with a gene that comes from the same parentage.

Now some will not fully comprehend the underlying principles of the genetics of cross breeding, but in its simplest form, genetic diversity adds more ammunition in reserve for unexpected encounters. These encounters tend to be health-related in many situations.

A healthy individual can combat attacks by viruses, bacteria or any other microorganism. Today the tendency is to go to the shelf and bring in antibiotics or some other appropriate medication to assist in the battle against the attack. There is nothing wrong with that approach, but the cheaper approach is to produce cattle that can withstand the challenges of the environment.

The example of Steer 79313 makes a case for healthy animals. Steer 79313 was sent to the feedlot on Dec. 23, 2002. The calf was presumed fully vaccinated, having received the standard protocol of pre-weaning, weaning and receiving vaccinations.

On Jan. 15 the pen rider found 79313 looking sickly, cut the steer into the sick bay and discovered a body temperature of 105 F. The Merck Manual lists normal body temperature of the beef cow at 101 F. Because normal temperature can vary by 1 degree throughout the day, Iím not too worried if a calf is 102 F or maybe even 103 F, but 105 F is a sick calf. The calf was treated with 2 cc Titanium IBR and 10.5 cc Micotil.

The following day the fever dropped to 103.3 F and the calf was returned to his home pen until April 17. On that day, 79313 was again sorted off to sick bay with a 104.3 F fever. He received 15.5 ml of A180 and 20.0 cc of Excenel 50 mg.

The following day, the fever had been reduced to 102 F and no medication was given. On the third day in sickbay, the steer was still carrying a slight fever and received 20 cc of Excenel 50 mg. The steer recovered. After following antibiotic withdrawal label instructions, 79313 was marketed on May 7. The total treatment cost for this steer was $49.83.

As we computed and analyzed the data, steer 79313 gained 3.59 pounds a day, converted 4.83 pounds of dry feed per pound of gain, put 679 pounds on the rail and graded select with a yield grade of 2.96. The steer sold for $116.21 per cwt on the rail and had a net return of minus $32.

In summary, 79313 was a great steer that could have been better had not two trips to the sick bay stolen the profit.

A live steer is better than a dead steer, so the treatments avoided an $820 loss if the calf died at the end of the feeding period. It is, however, important to remember cattle need to be bred for health and stay healthy. Genetics and management must interact to allow for no slippage of herd health at home or in the feed yard.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at *www.BeefTalk.com*. For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to *www.CHAPS2000.com* on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0156.

Hospital Notes for Steer 79313

Date	Temp (F)	Sickness	Weight (lbs.)	Treatment
January 15	105.0	Respiratory	690	2 cc Titanium® IBR, 10.5 cc Micotil
January 16	103.3	Respiratory	695	No treatment
April 17	104.3	Respiratory	1,033	15.5 ml A180, 20 cc Excenel 50 mg
April 18	102.0	Respiratory	1,054	No treatment
April 19	103.1	Respiratory	1,040	20 cc Excenel 50 mg
May 7			1,106	

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