

Is What We Say What We Do?

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Recently, the American Angus Association helped sponsor a survey of commercial cow-calf producers and industry specialists about identifying management priorities. The survey information was gathered and summarized by Tom Field of Colorado State University.

The top three priorities were herd nutrition, pasture and range, followed by herd health. The producer participants actually rated herd health second, but almost first. The industry specialists only rated herd health as their sixth priority, a glaring indication as to who actually owns the cattle.

Ownership, poor health and death are highly related to disaster. In fact, as reports start to arrive about the impact of the summer heat, our thoughts certainly go out to those producers who lost cattle due to heat stroke and the cascade of events that culminate with death due to excessive heat.

Maintaining health, whether ours or the cattle entrusted to our care, never can be taken for granted. In the world we live in, the environment swings widely, resulting in extreme conditions that can become so extreme that everyday management is overwhelmed. For producers, it is a very difficult balancing act between practicality and obsession.

As a side note, even as consumers desiring wholesome food, we all need to come eventually to some middle ground between an obsession for absolute purity versus the realities of living and eating in a world that we share with many organisms, some of which view us as viable meals.

The bottom line is that producers need to balance a process that weighs the benefits against the expense. As already was pointed out, that includes disease prevention and the capacity to react to extremes in the environment.

In terms of the survey, participants ranked health maintenance of nursing calves the highest, closely fol-

lowed by the health maintenance of weaned calves, replacement heifers and cows. The general treatment of health issues was next on the list, followed by the maintenance of bull health.

The survey would suggest that the relative cost of health care was not an issue and ranked below preventive and treatment costs involved in raising cattle. The conclusion from the survey would certainly indicate concern for health, but producers need to ask themselves if that concern translates into action.

In other words, is what we say what we do?

Many programs exist that provide producers with preconditioning programs that are very effective. However, if one searches the Internet about calf preconditioning or vaccination, of the 111,000-plus references, many simply relate to the cost of preconditioning.

In a very crude way of saying things, but a reality in the world of Web searches, 70 percent of the first page of references or Web sites highlighted the costs or value of herd health. Stopping at the that point, it would be safe to say that most, if not all, of the discussions on the many principles of herd health in relation to the No. 1 priority, calf health, has been a debate over costs and who pays.

On a personal note, having attended many meetings about preconditioning, the discussions have been very similar to the Web search outcome, with cost and value the repeated theme. However, times may indicate that herd health and calf prevaccination programs slowly are becoming the norm. Enough for now, but is what we say really what we do?

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at <http://www.BeefTalk.com>. For more information, contact the NDBCIA Office, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to <http://www.CHAPS2000.com> on the Internet.

**Top Three Health Programs for Commercial
Cow-Calf Producers and Industry Experts**

First – Health Maintenance of nursing calves

Second – Health Maintenance of weaned calves

Third – Health Maintenance of replacement heifers

From 'Priorities First: Identifying Management Priorities in the Commercial Cow-Calf Business'; summarized and authored by Tom Field, Ph.D., Fort Collins, Colorado and sponsored by the American Angus Association (www.angus.org)