

## Labor and Facilities for \$1 Per Head is a Pre-Weaning Bargain

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Preconditioning time is here. The programs are numerous, and several companies have similar programs to assure proper processing of cattle.

Close to home, the North Dakota Stockmen's Association launched the North Dakota Vaccination Information Program (VIP) last year to better document the vaccination history and management practices of feeder calves showing up for sale. The North Dakota Beef Quality Assurance program also provides effective documentation, training and certification for preparing calves for the transition from summer pastures to total independent living. For those who have circled the wagons more than once, memory would briefly flash terms like Green Tag, Gold Tag or even Blue Tag programs for preconditioning calves.

So, what is it that limits participation in a management procedure anchored in very sound production recommendations? The North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association (NDBCIA) discussed and discussed the situation, only to conclude more effort should be placed on the concept. Two points continue to surface during preconditioning discussions: the lack of adequate facilities for working calves and the inability to find help when needed.

Many programs designed for calves have roots in the feedlot. Feedlot calves are surrounded by board fences, chutes and significant corrals and labor is available in the form of permanent help. In stark contrast, prior to weaning, calves are surrounded by nothing but a perimeter wire fence, and the only sign of permanent help is when the owner pops in to check the water or to verify a call about a calf on the wrong side of the fence. Are labor and facilities the bottleneck?

To answer this question, the North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension Center, in conjunction with the NDBCIA, is offering an opportunity for beef producers to vaccinate and weigh calves. The DREC will provide a portable working tub,

crowding alley, chute, scale and head gate to local producers to offset the lack of portable facilities to work cattle. In addition, labor and record analysis will be provided.

The producer will need to round up and pen the calves and provide individual calf identification (electronic or regular ear tag) with up-to-date calving information. The producer will need to provide the vaccine and all vaccinations must be administered by a Beef Quality Assurance certified individual. The fee for providing the facility and labor will be \$1 per head processed or worked through the chutes.

Historically, technology advancement has been slow in the beef industry. There is only so much a producer can allot in terms of dollars for facility improvement and available labor. From the center's perspective, we are about to enter on a quest to help identify what truly limits participation in preconditioning programs.

The other day, the production crew composed of university students processed cattle through the portable facility using electronic readers at 40 seconds per calf or 30 seconds per cow. This was a new crew with little chute-side experience with this particular setup. Given some time in the field, there is no reason calves can't be processed at the rate of two calves a minute or 120 calves an hour. A normal day in the country would allow the DREC team to turn out 700 to 800 preconditioned calves even in remotest sections of North Dakota.

There is no place too remote not to initiate a pre-weaning process for calves. Stay tuned for fall updates. May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at [www.BeefTalk.com](http://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](http://www.CHAPS2000.com) on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0105.

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# Current Processing Time for Pre-Conditioning Calves and Weighing Cows

Calves 40 seconds

Cows 30 seconds

