

Herd Health is Paramount to Profits

By Kris Ringwall
Extension Beef Specialist
NDSU Extension Service



Herd health is one of those silent profit makers -- or takers. On a per calf basis, dead calves, sick calves and poor-performing calves take the profit out of a set of calves, affecting cow/calf, backgrounding or feedlot enterprises.

At the North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension Center, we are administering preweaning shots to the calves we will wean early. The vaccination dates for the later-weaned calves also have been put on the fall calendar. Treatment costs were illustrated in our last feedyard closeout sheet. The treatment costs were significant for several steers and triggered some vaccination questions.

To look at those questions, let's look at some of the data. The bottom 25 steers (20 percent of the lot based on net return) were compared to the top 25 steers. The two groups were similar weight when received in the feedyard (721 pounds for the low-return steers and 710 pounds for the high-return steers). The groups had 5.7 frame scores.

Although the low-return group of calves simply did not perform as well as the high-return calves, the most noticeable numbers were total cost of gain. For the low-return group, total cost of gain in the feedyard was \$62.47 per hundredweight of gain and \$53.93 for the high-return group. On a per head basis, the low-return calves had a total feed yard cost \$270, and the high-return calves had a total feed yard cost of \$281. (I bet you thought, like I did, that the low-return group would be the high-cost group.)

Income limitations, not feedyard cost, forced steers into the low-return group. The low-return group averaged \$835 per carcass on the rail, while the high return group averaged \$1,020 per carcass on the rail, a difference of \$185. The low-return group did not cost us more, but simply did not have the income potential on the rail.

This is what the value-added message is all about: get rid of poor-doing, poor-performing cattle. Beef producers (and the industry) cannot afford to have poor performers. Compared to the high-return group, the low-return cattle gained almost a half pound less per day while eating about

a quarter of a pound more of feed per pound of gain.

The low-return steers had almost 0.9 square inches less rib eye, with slightly greater yield grades (3.27 versus 3.09; closer to 3 is better) and 62 pounds less carcass weight. Only four of the 25 low-return steers graded choice; all but one of the 25 high-return cattle graded choice. The low return steers flunked on all of the big carcass profit drivers -- efficiency and speed of gain, carcass weight and carcass grade.

There can be many reasons for each individual steer not to perform. Those reasons may be traced to management or genetics. Genetics will be addressed at a later date, but calf health is a management issue.

One noticeable difference provided by the feed yard was treatment costs per head. The low return group averaged \$20.93 per steer in treatment cost while the high profit steers averaged only \$3.08 per steer. That difference had better get our attention. What was going on? We need to know.

In the low return group, 20 of the 25 steers were pulled and treated for an actual per head cost of \$26.16. In the high-return group only five of the 25 steers were pulled and treated at an individual cost of \$15.40. Not only did the low returns get sick, but several had to be re-pulled for complete recovery.

I cannot tell you the reason for the low-return steers, but my mind is thinking and appropriate vaccination protocols and individual calf responses need to be evaluated. The value of healthy calves is not debatable.

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 BT0155.

25 Low Net Return Steers vs 25 High Return Steers*

	Low Return Steers	High Return Steers
Net return per steer	- \$ 27.39	\$ 148.07
Receiving weight	721 lbs	710 lbs
Frame score	5.7	5.7
Total cost of gain per cwt.	\$ 62.47	\$ 53.93
Total cost of gain per head	\$ 270	\$ 281
Marketable value per head	\$ 835	\$ 1,020
Average daily gain	2.98 lbs	3.44 lbs
Pounds of dry feed per pound of gain	5.85 lbs	5.60 lbs
Percentage choice	16 %	96 %
Yield grade	3.3	3.1
Ribeye area	11.5	12.4
Hot carcass weight	718 lbs	780 lbs
Treatment costs per head	\$ 20.93	\$ 3.08

* Top and bottom 20 percent of the lot based on net return.
NDSU Dickinson Research Extension Center Lot 2483
included 123 steers.