

Whether or Not There Is Profit, Producers Deal with Realizers

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The beef industry has worked hard to assure the consuming public that beef is wholesome. Beef is a nutrition-packed part of our diets and is here to stay, but change is galloping fast into the industry.

The recent news about bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) or mad cow disease, put beef front and center in the news. But, with any newsworthy event, meeting the public's demand for news seldom provides follow through for those directly involved. The general public moves to tomorrow's news, leaving those involved in yesterday's news to clean up and get their lives back in order.

The beef industry is not going to forget BSE. The challenge of providing consumers with the greatest beef available is only going to become more obvious. Most would say, keep up the good work; continue doing what you're doing and make way for some new technology.

Beef producers care for living organisms: cows, bulls, and calves, plus horses, dogs and a sundry collection of others living on the ranch. Producers care, yes, to the last breath. That's what makes it so difficult to deal with a realizer.

Realizer is a term more used in the feedlot perhaps than the cow/calf side of the business. A realizer is a calf without a positive outlook on life, a runt. Realizers have always been a challenge for beef producers, but that challenge will become more difficult in the future.

The North Dakota State University Dickinson Research Extension Center recently witnessed a realizer birth. The Center had 40 calves preconditioned at a custom lot. Having had many excellent preconditioning experiences, this lot certainly tested our patience.

Of the 40 steer calves in the lot, 12 ended up in the sick pen, primarily with respiratory problems. Two of the calves died, resulting in a pen mortality rate (the number of deaths per calves in the pen) of 5 percent. This is an extremely high figure and erased any profit generated in this set of calves. Fortunately, the experience was atypical for the Center.

Along with the mortality rate for any sick pen of calves, a figure seldom presented is the morbidity number. Morbidity is the relative incidence of disease, not death, or the per-

centage of total sick calves. For this pen of calves, the morbidity rate was 30 percent (12 calves divided by 40 calves). Obviously, morbidity is better than mortality, but there is a side problem with those calves in the morbidity column.

You see, realizers are born in the morbidity column. Realizers are those calves treated and recovered, but never fully returning to active participation in life. Most treated calves pull through with no side effects, but in this pen the realizer percentage was 2.5 percent.

Calf 3156 arrived as a healthy, pre-vaccinated calf ready to spend life away from home. Weaned Nov. 6 at 600 pounds, things were fine until everyone started getting sick. Calf 3156 ran a fever of 108 degrees Nov. 29, had a snotty nose and looked like a typical respiratory problem. Treatment helped, as it did for the other calves, but Dec. 4, 3156 was noticeably falling back with a 103.4 temperature.

Four treatments later--Dec. 19, 22, 24 and 27--and a 106.5 temperature on Dec. 27, resulted in 3156 returning to the sick pen while the rest of the calves were happy to be off to the finishing lot. As expected, the finishing lot did not want to contend with 3156. Treatments were continued on January 3 and 6 and the calf still had no home. The calf still weighs almost 600 pounds, roughly the same weight he was weaned at and arrived at the preconditioning lot.

With no marketing opportunities, let's just say the calf finally found a room at a shelter where someone who would provide comfort and feed and hope for the best for a calf valued at \$1. Treatment costs totaled \$93.94.

What we produce, realizer or not, as producers, we must deal with it, profit or not.

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 BT0178.

The Birth of a Realizer

Date	Event	Weight	Treated	Temp
March 15	Birth	92	No	
May 23	Branding vaccinations		No	
October 14	Pre-weaning vaccinations		No	
November 6	Weaning vaccinations		No	
November 6	Weaning	600	No	
November 6	Shipped to pre-conditioning lot			
November 29	Sick	606	Yes	108
December 4	Sick	608	Yes	103.4
December 19	Sick - chronic	602	Yes	
December 22	Sick - chronic	602	Yes	
December 24	Sick	614	Yes	103
December 27	Sick	598	Yes	106.5
January 3	Realizer			
January 6	Realizer			
January 9	Transferred to hospice			