

BeefTalk 507: A Few Nickels

For 20 nickels, I can get a dose of anthrax vaccine to vaccinate a calf.

What can one get for 20 nickels?

Sorting and saving change out of one's pants pockets at the end of day still continues. This takes place even though, in today's credit card-driven world, the concept of change is quickly becoming an abnormality.

I don't think one would turn down change, but some would dismiss change as inconvenient. If one puts that comment in perspective with many throughout the world, it is sad.

There is hope, however. I have not found any kid who won't grab a handful of change without a smile.

Interestingly, the kids are quick to sort the coins. Out go the pennies and nickels, maybe even the dimes, with great hopes of finding quarters, half dollars or maybe even dollar coins.

What does one get with pennies and nickels today? Some would say not much, but for 20 nickels, I can get a dose of anthrax (*Bacillus anthracis*) vaccine to vaccinate a calf.

In some cases, it might take more or less nickels depending on the local veterinarian. The point is that the vaccine does not cost much. In contrast, if a herd comes in contact with *Bacillus anthracis* and is not vaccinated, at least some of the cattle or other common domesticated livestock could develop anthrax.

Although uncommon, some areas have an increased risk for anthrax, so producers should contact their veterinarian to discuss appropriate managerial options. Anthrax is a reportable disease and must be contained.

If anthrax is diagnosed, the costs will increase. The expenses include proper disposal (preferably cremation) of those animals that die, isolation and antibiotic treatment for all animals displaying symptoms, subsequent vaccination of all the exposed animals and finally herd quarantine.

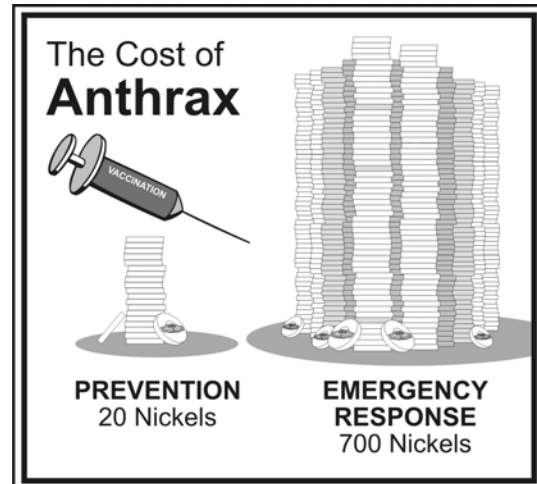
How costly? Well, for one thing, the cost will exceed 20 nickels.

If one was to use some estimates from research data collected by the Dickinson Research Extension Center, the costs increase more than tenfold. Those costs include distance traveled, gathering time, number of calves worked and other expenses.

The center's best estimate during this effort would be \$7 per animal for working the calves, treatment, vaccination and documenting the living cattle. The cattle will need at least two trips through the chute, so, along with the miscellaneous disposal costs, the 20 nickels are now more than 400 nickels per cow or calf.

Animal loss impacts income potential. Plus, the proper disposal of the dead cattle will bring significant costs in time, material and equipment.

In addition, the need to move, process and work the cattle costs money. Calves are living, changing and growing entities. The dollars are made in growth. Everyone loses the more cattle are worked. The weight loss may not seem like much, but it does add up. Measured shrink has been estimated at up to \$10 to \$20 per calf in lost income potential, according to research at the center.



Now take the 400 nickels and add another 300 nickels and the total starts to exceed 700 nickels per calf. The bottom line is that it makes sense to spend the 20 nickels to start with rather than the 700 nickels after the fact.

The old saying by Benjamin Franklin is, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Anthrax vaccination serves to make that point.

All livestock producers need to have a strong working relationship with a veterinarian. Herd health options need to be discussed, tailored for location and evaluated for appropriateness within the operation.

Yes, the 400 nickels needed to work a calf and the 300 nickels of lost income are better managed within a business plan than an emergency response plan. Working one’s cattle always will cost money, but working cattle to implement herd health programs creates economic opportunity.

Working cattle in response to a crisis can only minimize loss. Plan ahead, develop a sound herd vaccination program and don't forget anthrax if your location and area history warrants it. Consult your veterinarian.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at <http://www.BeefTalk.com>.

For more information, contact the NDBCIA Office, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to <http://www.CHAPS2000.com> on the Internet.