

BeefTalk 789: I Don't Feel Well Today

Producers should strive for a stress-free environment when weaning and stress-free movement of cattle in their care.

The other day, I was enjoying a nice fall afternoon and viewing this year's calves on ample pastures.

Their mothers were keeping a trusting eye on their calves, with no indication the calves' world soon would change because weaning time is fast approaching.

After basking in the moderate sun and breeze, I returned home feeling sluggish. By the next morning, life had deteriorated and continued to do so during the next couple of days.

Why? I pondered. In actuality, I had been traveling a lot in the last couple of weeks, bedding down in unfamiliar surroundings, eating food out of my routine and making schedules work even though the hours in a day were less than the hours needed, but things seemed fine.

Then, I noticed the slight cough and unwanted sinus guests, that persistent, slight tingling. A sneeze, another cough and things seemed fine for a couple of hours. The tingling spread down the throat, moving wherever opportunity allowed. These unwanted new guests made themselves at home on the tongue, tonsils or whatever appendage seemed hospitable.

Sitting was more pleasurable than standing. Movement was slower. The 100-yard dash would be an eternity. Muscles that I had not noticed for a while got that crampy feeling, moving but reluctantly.

The sinus guests have not stated their names, but I had known them before. They probably were the virus family, along with all their bacterial friends. They found comfort within me despite my pleading for them to go away. Pretty soon, their party seemed to be in full swing. Phlegm (commonly called "snot") and other party aftermath started to fill their space and oozed out, triggering more coughing and sneezing. Some would say quite a party.

Finally something had to be done. The internal furnace kicked in: sweating, more discomfort, but discomfort for the viral and bacterial guests as well. Soon, with the help of an army of antibodies sacrificing their life, the ooze was filled with the last of the party-goers as the virus and bacterial guests were swooshed out with a few tough but deserving coughs. What remains are tired and worn-out muscles, irritated tissues, sour and traumatized throat, sinuses and other party spots, mostly unknown.

The pace needed to slow. I needed time to recover, and maybe some pampering, but more than anything, I needed rest and familiar surroundings. The favorite chair, the well-felt blanket, the same shape bowl, the feel of regular spoons, a nudge from the same old dog all felt good, and recovery was on the way.

My mind got back to thinking about things other than self-preservation. I thought about those calves I had seen earlier in the week. I thought about how similar we really are and how they, too, soon would be doing what I had just done: traveling a lot, bedding down in unfamiliar surroundings, eating food out of their routine and making new schedules work.

We stress those calves and force their bodies into the very scenario I had just lived through. We gather calves, work them, ship them, sell them, ship them, move them, work them and then tell them they are home, now get to eating. They get sick like we do. They feel just as we do. They respond just as we do.

Stress is the hidden opportunity for all that is bad. If a bad thought needs to be corrected, modern technology cannot offset poor management and the elevated stress levels associated with poor management. We can vaccinate, and we should. But more than anything, we should strive for a stress-free environment when weaning and stress-free movement of cattle in our care.

A stress-free calf that leaves the ranch without stress needs to arrive at a new home without stress. The 15-year-old cow still survives on the ranch because she feels at home. That feeling should be our goal. That weaned calf has yet to even begin to experience life, but it really needs to bring a piece of the ranch along as the journey starts.

Yes, some will think me soft, but I still have a piece or two of important points in my life tucked away. The calf is no different. The shift from summer pasture to winter feedlot will go much smoother if even just a piece of the summer pasture is still evident. Maybe the flowing water, fresh hay or soft bedding will make the trip easier.

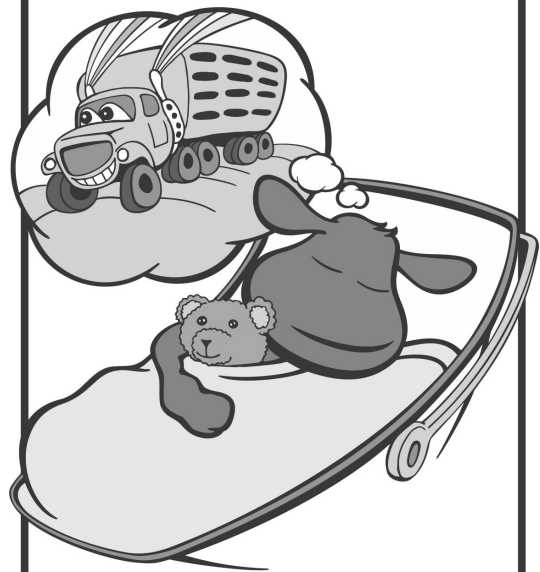
Keeping the ration sweet and palatable will bring the taste of milk and grass back. And just like us, keeping the dark doors, the howling winds, the sharp boards, the whips and the unforgiving hot shots locked away can only help assure the calf has a pleasant trip. Calves and us, we both need a little tender care, especially when tomorrow is an unknown.

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.

Strive for a Stress-free Environment



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