



BeefTalk 636: Marketing Calves - Let the Buyers Know They Are Yours

SUPPORTING MATERIALS



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Right now in the beef business, the calves are being moved and most are happy. Words such as premiums and discounts seem to be taking a backseat to good prices. The extra few dollars for giving calves some unique or extra care are being muffled by gross weight and total dollars.

However, perhaps some momentary thought should be given to managerial practices that have proven through the years to be sound practices. The problem is, when the obvious payment for calf processing disappears, then the logical conclusion is why even do it.

The first reason, although somewhat subtle, is because it just makes sense. The care and well-being of cattle always is the

highest priority for cattle producers, so calves are prepared for market through traditional weaning procedures, backgrounding and vaccinations.

As calves acclimate to new environments, they settle in and are less stressed. Cattle buyers are savvy and, contrary to common thought, very data intense. Even today, as calves are sorted and sold, the buyers are checking previous histories and performance.

Feedlots need sets of cattle that contribute to a predefined, marketable package. By identifying with a marketable package, bidding can get intense because feed yards need to fill pens. However, as cow-calf producers, don't ever take for granted the need to make sure buyers know your cattle very well.

Well-presented cattle show and sell well. One cannot help but remind producers that market preparation starts with breeding decisions because the type of calf one is going to sell really depends on the genetics. However, that is another discussion.

Today, the point is the market preparation of the calf crop. Market preparations start when an ear tag is placed in the



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calf at birth. All calves compete with each other, so a unique market identification is critical, just like the fancy jersey of your favorite sports team or beverage label. If they are your calves, mark them, tag them and put caps on them if needed, but let no calf go unnoticed. It is called marketing.

The ear tag, in combination with the calving book, is the starting point for unique marketing opportunities. Being able to sell calves with data and age and source verification still is critical. Granted, today many producers are not age and sourcing calves because the market is not calling for it. However, don't get lackadaisical because the market remains competitive and those calves with data remain noticed.

Likewise, vaccination programs need to be followed. Calves also need time to lower any health risks associated with weaning, selling and moving. With the choices available in today's vaccines, the process is fairly simple and there are many local veterinarians and distributors who can guide a producer with the appropriate health protocol that fits the local area.

Once a proper vaccination protocol has been established for the calves, bunk-broke calves that are quick to find water and feed on arrival are always in demand. These calves adapt well and adjust to new feedlot conditions without the hassles of dumb, newly weaned calves that have yet to learn what life means without mom.

They do learn, but the learning curve is steeper and comes at a greater cost once the calves leave the home ranch. Having a bad day is waking up the next morning having just paid \$900 per head for bawling calves and finding one dead with more down and failing. Not good.

That being said, the process of preparing calves for market does not change the anticipation or remove the nervousness associated with marketing the annual calf crop. Market swings on a monthly, weekly and daily basis make the annual sales event a crucial day in the life of a farm or ranch.

Perhaps the best advice still is to follow the proper preparations for the market, but market one set or group at a time. Granted, the thrill of seeing the whole calf crop loaded, unloaded at the sale barn and then acknowledged at sale time brings excitement to the day. However, the more prudent approach is to market selected groups of calves through a series of days with specific markets in mind. It makes more sense.

The bottom line is that calves will bring what the market needs, no more and no less. Remember, have your calves well-prepared for the market and don't forget to contact last year's buyers and seek out a few extra. Also, remember that marketing is how business survives.

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.

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