

Reduce Summer Stress on Calves by Developing a Vaccination Program

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May is always a busy time. The fun of the approaching summer, the warm air, occasional rain showers, and cows and calves strolling through the thick, green, cool-season grasses makes one appreciate rural life.

At this time of the year, grass and calves grow at astonishing rates. Unfortunately, we all can relate to those days when all the calves didn't bounce up like they should.

After arriving at the pasture, a calf is missing. How does one know? It's easy because the missing calf is the biggest, fattest, shiniest one in the whole pasture and stands out like a pillar of stone.

The calf is spotted in an awkward position. From a distance, the odds look bad. The calf should be up. The producer already knows the outcome. Approaching the calf, the producer sees that the calf is dead, laid out flat. The producer's heart sinks. The pride of the pasture is gone, succumbed to overeating too much of a good thing or perhaps an off day. The reasons are many, the result is the same.

This example is one of many key reasons for the need to vaccinate calves. In this case, there is a group of clostridial diseases. Overeating is a common name for this example. The diseases are fairly common, so a routine vaccination is certainly highly recommended.

The various programs are predefined by years of practical experience, knowing the cows and the environment where the cattle are going. The time spent now processing the calves for a summer of grazing needs to take priority.

For some, the calves are worked in smaller groups at very young ages. Each group is moved to a cool-season pasture as they are worked. For others, the calves are not worked until all the calves are born and a major workday scheduled on the calendar. The workday often coincides with the available work force. The workday commonly is called branding, and the work force is more likely family and friends sharing time to get the work done.

All this activity is very important because the work is hard, but more so for planning for the very near future. That very near future means the life of the calf or perhaps even the cow.

Once cattle are turned out to summer pasture, the opportunity to catch up with the cows and calves is very limited. The equipment and labor needed seldom are available again until fall. The vaccinations that the calves, and perhaps cows, receive are the start of building a strong immune system through the summer program and possibly the rest of their lives.

This is not unlike getting our children ready to start school. We can all relate to the many trips to the doctor's office or county health nurse making sure that all the children have the required vaccinations prior to comingling as they start preschool, kindergarten or first grade. In fact, those vaccinations for children are so important that many are required by law.

Our children simply are not allowed into group settings until they have received these required vaccinations. Perhaps the word required is a bad word to use because the industry is facing many issues regarding the long-term tracking of cattle. However, in this sense, the necessity of the vaccinations is very real.

The consequences of not vaccinating are heavy on the pocketbook. The programs vary, so contact your local veterinarian and don't skimp on vaccine. A dead calf simply is not a desired outcome. Visit and compare notes for the region and pick the right program for your area. If the conversation is short, start discussing the clostridial diseases and then build a program.

May you find all your NAIS-approved 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 BT0300.

“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

PREVENTION

CURE

Consult with your local veterinarian and implement a good vaccination program today.