



Feedlot Technical Bulletin

Starting Cattle: Focused on Health

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The importance of receiving calf management and nutrition is often overlooked even though it is probably the most important time period in the feedlot. Bovine Respiratory Disease (BRD) is one of the most common health issues of receiving calves and is the most costly beef cattle disease in the U.S. (Snowder et al., 2007). Costs associated with BRD morbidity, mortality as well as prevention and treatment have been estimated to be between \$13.90 (Snowder et al., 2006) and \$15.57 (Faber et al., 1999) per head. However, treatment of sick calves requires recognition, Dr. Dan Thomson of Kansas State University examined lung lesions at harvest and discovered that greater than 40% of cattle never treated had moderate to severe lung lesions while those with severe lesions had nearly a ¼ of a pound decrease in ADG. It is important that a receiving calf management plan allows for ample observation of calves during opportune times (i.e. just after feeding) to recognize morbidity issues.

It is well known that feed intake is depressed during this period which can lead to sub-optimal nutrient intakes when the calf is under the greatest amount of stress and disease challenge. In order to compensate for depressed intake, it is vital that nutrient density is increased in the starter ration to ensure deficiencies do not occur. The nutrients of primary concern during this period are energy, protein, vitamins, and trace minerals. These vital nutrients are recognized to help stressed calves cope with the effects of stress by supporting immune function. Busby et al. (2008) examined data from feedlots across western Iowa and reported that cattle never treated gained over ¼ lb/day more than their counterparts treated 1 or 2 times throughout the feeding period. Even though this trial does not differentiate, the highest occurrence of morbidity in calves typically occurs early in the feeding period, illustrating the importance of a well designed receiving calf nutrition and management plan that is focused on promoting optimal animal health.

It is important to recognize that we will never be able to completely stop calves from getting sick. We can, however, ensure that calves are provided the opportunity to effectively cope with disease challenge. QLF Starter supplements can help, they contain a high proportion of cane molasses to promote feed intake and are highly fortified with vitamins and trace minerals to support optimum immune function. Many QLF Starters also contain a yeast extract product to further promote rumen health, feed intake and immune function.

Starting Cattle Management Plan: Goals and Considerations

- Get calves eating
- Promote consistent feed intake
- Increase ration nutrient density to match intake
- Ample clean water supply
- Calf observation
- Proper vaccination program
- Stress reduction
- Focus on animal health

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