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16 pens • 50-375 head per pen

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Mounds in each pen

Large amount of concrete

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Call 712.261.2378

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Grand River Cattle Co. LLC



8,500 head capacity

70 pens • 50-200 per pen

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Pasture backgrounding of calves

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VET'S VIEW

By Grant Dewell, DVM

Veterinary Diagnostic and Production Animal Medicine, Iowa State University

BRD control takes more than vaccine

Bovine Respiratory Disease (BRD) continues to be a major health problem for calves that are placed in feedyards. Preconditioning programs have been advocated for years as a method to improve the health of calves prior to delivery to the feedyard. However, vaccination alone is not sufficient to guarantee respiratory health of calves.

Cattle producers looking to place calves in a feedyard need to evaluate the whole picture to determine if the calves are good candidates to feed.

Gestation

Recent research has identified that the reproductive potential in heifers can be influenced by the nutrition of the cow during gestation. It is possible that nutrition during gestation could also impact other systems including immune function.

This spring, there were many newborn calves that were deficient in Vitamin A during gestation that were weak and had poor immune function. It is likely that calves that survived may have decreased immune function as they move into the feedlot phase of production.

Colostrum intake

There have been several studies linking inadequate intake of colostrum at birth with decreased health and performance in the feedyard. Therefore producers wanting to retain ownership of their calves or who want to sell calves with a good reputation, should make sure that all calves consume colostrum within the first

twelve hours of life.

Nutrition

Besides proper nutrition during gestation, the calf needs to have good nutrition prior to and after weaning. Many feedyards reported increased respiratory disease and death loss last year in calves that were coming off drought-stressed pastures. Cows and calves need adequate protein, energy, minerals and vitamins during summer grazing to make sure the calves are ready to perform in the feedyard.

Castration and dehorning

Calves should be castrated and dehorned as early as possible. Waiting until weaning time will increase the stress that calves undergo and negatively impact their immune function. Ideally, calves should be castrated and dehorned by 3 months of age prior to going to breeding pastures.

Vaccination

Once the foundation of good health has been established with good management and proper nutrition the calf is ready to be vaccinated. Take time and spread vaccinations out during the suckling phases. Stacking 3 to 4 vaccines at the same time may overwhelm the calves immune function and impair a proper immune response.

Starting your vaccine program early when calves are less than 3 months of age will allow you time to get multiple doses of all vaccines into the calf without stacking all vaccinations at the same time.

Minimize stress

Finally, look for ways to decrease stress on the calf. As mentioned before, castrating and dehorning should be done at an early age to minimize stress.

Another stressful event is weaning itself. Fenceline weaning has been shown to be less stressful for the calf. Additionally, acclimating cattle to the feedyard using low stress handling practices can improve the health of calves.

Look for feedyards that have adopted low-stress practices to smooth the transition of your calves from the farm to the feedyard.