

MISTAKES Cattle Feeders Should Try To Avoid

Dee Griffin, UNL-GPVEC, Clay Center, NE

Outline

1. Not understanding the sequence of events
 - a. times of occurrence in common diseases ...
 - b. reasonable outcomes
2. Not getting ALL your people involved/committed ... includes training
3. Not being ready
 - a. when cattle arrive, environmental changes, wrecks ...
 - b. have a detailed, step by step written plan ...
 - c. and review it with everyone ... ask for input
4. Not committing enough time to observe and handle cattle
5. Not letting the cattle get to know the people who care for them
6. Not selecting appropriate high quality products
 - a. Appropriate vaccines and medications
 - b. Appropriate formulated, mixed, delivered and monitored ration
 - c. Avoiding marginal value products that may interfere with the objectives
 - d. Product Quality, Stepping Over Dollars Picking Up Nickels
7. Not looking at the animals you treat
 - a. don't let the thermometer do your thinking
8. Not sticking to the plan / protocol
 - a. don't let anyone start jumping around with treatments
9. Not letting go
 - a. continuing to spend money on lost causes ... have a "quitting plan"
10. Not critically analyzing outcomes

Disease sequence of events:

- Susceptible animal exposed.
- Incubation is the period (time) from the first replication of the disease causing biological agent until sufficient compromise of the target organ(s) occurs causing loss of function of the target organ(s). For most viral BRD this averages three days. The secondary bacterial BRD this may be three to five days behind the initial viral infection.
- Inflammation occurs in stages. Early, the body diverts white blood cells and blood in to the affected area typically causing swelling of tissue, both cells and spaces between cells. As the inflammation continues, loss of function of the affected tissue occurs. The late stage of inflammation is involved in the body trying to clean up, remove, or repair/reconstruct the damaged tissue. The late stage of inflammation is the first stage of recovery.
- Recovery begins in the last stage of inflammation. In the first recovery stage, the body begins building defense against future infections and cleaning up the damage tissue. This stage requires seven to ten days. While improving future defense and tissue continues in the next stages of recovery, the focus becomes tissue repair and beginnings of the return of function. These stages may require 14 to 21 days. In the last stage of repair, the focus is on remodeling of damaged tissues and compensation for any function loss. The final stage may not begin until the third or fourth week of disease recovery and will typically last of about four weeks, but if the damage was severe it may continue for the life of the animal.
- Expect a complete recovery to apparent normal lung function and growth from BRD events from which the animal recovers without treatment or responds well to appropriate treatment. Early intervention (by both the animal and the caretaker) is critical for this outcome.
- Expect decrease response to therapy, subsequent growth (gain and efficiency) in BRD events that either get a head start because of inadequate animal response or delayed therapy. This is the common outcome in put-together cattle (commingling and time), especially in high-stressed younger stock.

Get ALL your people involved/committed

- This can be “the Good”, “the Bad”, “the Ugly”, frustrating and time consuming. However, it is potentially the cattle feeder’s most powerful tool. Starting cattle is the ultimate team sport, but in this game, there are NO MOST VALUABLE PLAYERS.
- Your people need a leader, not a cheerleader or a dictator. Leaders engage the brains and actions of their people, they respect the talents of their people and treat them as such, BUT they do not give up control. Management has structure, but don’t let the structure prevent communication of observations or ideas.
- Employee training, regularly scheduled, will not only improve skills, but will help keep everyone on the same page and will improve communication. As often as not, training sessions will function as a forum for getting concerns and misunderstanding out in the open.

Be ready

- A properly designed and maintained facility is an important factor that influences proper care of new cattle. If cattle do not flow through your facilities with ease, analyze the situation and make the required changes. Avoid shadows; long or straight snakes; small, dusty, or poorly ventilated holding areas. Adjustment or corrections may be needed if more than one person is required to move cattle from the holding area to the working chute. Chutes should apply no more pressure than is required to hold the average size animal you work. One pound of pressure for each pound of body weight is a good rule of thumb to follow.
- Pen should have mounds constructed forward to connect to the bunk pad and allow for drainage away from the bunk and provide at least 30 square feet per animal on the crest. Mounds should have a 30 degree slope on the sides and a 5 degree slope away from the bunk. If the conditions are dusty, a temporary cross fence that pushes the cattle toward the bunk and confines them to 75 square feet per animal will help control the dust. During muddy conditions giving the cattle 350 square feet per animal will allow the pen to dry faster. The best mounds are made from “seasoned manure”. A fast run with a box scraper at least monthly will help control dust and dry times and promote good drainage to lessen mud concerns in wet times.
- People must be trained in safe and proper cattle handling techniques and chute operation. Remember the “4-S’s” ... Safety of yourself, safety of the people you work around, safety of the animal, and safety of the food that will be made from the animal. Personnel trained in the technique of proper handling, feeding, and care of newly arrived animals make great deal of difference in the performance of cattle during the first 30 days after arrival. Your personnel must not only know how to do their job, but what kind of problems to expect with the different set of cattle. Your veterinarian and nutritionist can aid you in a training program designed to meet the needs of your operation.
- Have a detailed plan. Bring together your people resources (management, employees, family, veterinarian, nutritionist, suppliers, etc) and review in detail each aspect of your production process. Evaluate how each step in the process is handled and develop a written detailed, step by step plan for how each step will be handled. Review the details of the final plan with everyone who will be involved. When the plan is finished ... STICK TO IT.
- It is important for your feed supplements and medication suppliers to know your cattle buying plans. They will be able to work with your veterinarian and nutritionist to insure you have the best quality of supplies available for you cattle. Additionally, this knowledge will allow them to have the correct quality of supplies on hand during the receiving period.

Time commitment

- The number one rule is to make sure you have plenty of time to care for your animals. A common cause of health wrecks is failure to timely observe and care for animals. Having plenty of time to observe and care for cattle is especially important early in the morning. You need to be finished feeding, identifying sick cattle, sorting sick cattle, treating sick cattle, and returning sick cattle to their pens before ten every morning, especially if the ambient temperature will be above 80 F degrees ... You must be absolutely finished handling cattle. It is very stressful to work sick cattle past late morning when the weather is reaching temperatures over 80 degrees.
- Try to handle only the number of newly weaned cattle two people can feed, sort, and treat easily and slowly during the four hours from six to ten each morning, and stagger the receiving periods so that no more than 200 animals per person are being started at one time.

Let the cattle get to know their caretakers

- Cattle are prey animals and fear of their caretakers negatively influences their response to disease and makes evaluating their disease status difficult. Spending time in the pens with the cattle each day from the first day of arrival will make it much easier to find sick cattle early and handling them with ease, giving them time to find figure out what is wanted of them will decrease their cortisol output, improving their response to therapy.

Select appropriate high quality products

- The disease defense system is amazing, but much of the value that can be achieved when the system is supported can be lost if inappropriate or poor quality health products are chosen. For example, generally BRD results when additive stressor decrease the a susceptible animal's disease defenses, and the animal is exposed to a disease causing agent. Appropriate vaccines, given ahead of the disease exposure be a great aid. Many of the stressors involved and exposure occurred before the cattle arrive at the feedyard. Products selected have little time to mediate the course of potential BRD. Therefore, MLV vaccines that have a rapid affect are a much better choice than KV vaccines. Most commonly, BRD has a head start in high-stressed young commingled cattle. Therefore, mass-medication with an effective antibiotic is appropriate. Added products that do not immediately affect the BRD outcome are not appropriate. Antibiotics have become expensive, but selecting an ineffective antibiotic can be like "Stepping over dollar bills, while you are picking up nickels."

Evaluate treated animals

- Evaluating treated cattle starts with knowing how to spot signs of sickness and what body systems the signs indicate may be affected. Regular training and review with everyone who plays a part in cattle health is important. The "DART" (Depression, Appetite, Respiration and Temperature) system is very useful. BUT, employees must have time to properly evaluate cattle numerous times during the day.
- Set up a system scoring the severity of illness. The system should include a rating scale for depression and intestinal fill. Score the animal's degree of sickness BEFORE its temperature is taken. Look at the sick animal, do not let the thermometer be the "brains of the outfit".
- The target temperature to initiate therapy is 105 F. Not all animals with this temperature are sick and sick cattle commonly have temperatures lower than this, but it is a start IF the animal also has symptoms of illness. Ninety percent of the cattle with this temperature, when pulled properly for treatment, will respond to treatment within three days. If the treatment program is appropriate and less than 80 percent of the cattle are responding to treatment, or the relapse rate is more than ten percent, the cattle are being started on treatment too late. Besides poor time management, other reasons for cattle to be started on treatment late are; the source of the cattle and poor cattle handling. It is difficult to evaluate the early symptoms of BRD in cattle from sources that have prolonged the shipping stress or in cattle that are handled roughly.
- Weighing sick cattle during treatment cycles has proven useful in monitoring response.
- All treated animals should be individually identified and receive an individual treatment record. The animal's temperature and subjective evaluation of its health progress should be recorded daily. A two-degree drop in temperature between the first and second day of therapy is common in animals that are responding appropriately to therapy. Consider an animal recovered if its temperature is below 103 F after the third day of therapy and the animal appears to be eating normally.

Stick to the treatment plan

- The treatment regimen must be simple and cost effective. The regimen should include an antibiotic or combination of antibiotics to fight the infection and supportive therapy for the animals metabolic and immune systems. The regimen must not compromise the animal, or the quality or safety of the meat marketed.
- Older therapeutic regimens can be effective if initiated early. New, high tech antibiotics appear to be very expensive, but cost analysis (Drug Cost of Gain) of these products generally supports their selection. The expense down fall for

these products is frequently associated with continued treatments given to animals from which little response to therapy is expected.

- Exceeding recommended dose can be dangerous to dehydrated cattle and cause a serious residue problem. Gentamicin or neomycin should never be use parentally in cattle.
- While supportive medications such as antihistamines, flunixin, vitamins, corticosteroid and electrolytes are commonly used in feedlot treatment regimens, however, little data that validates their benefit in routine feedlot treatment programs. Place more emphasis on the quality of the feeding program for sick cattle instead of chute side supportive therapy.

Letting go

- Giving up on a sick animal that has failed to recover is one of the toughest things we ask our treatment crew to do. Medications given to sick cattle that repeatedly fail to respond are extremely expensive. Recognizing when it is time to stop therapy is tough, but simple rules for when to stop must be developed and enforced.
- Total cost of therapy may be a good guideline, but should be included with decisions based on the number of therapy days. Management should evaluate continue therapy on all sick cattle that fail to respond with in seven days.

Assess and analyze

- “You can not manage what you do not measure”. This means develop records that provide USEFUL information. However, looking over records with out proper critical analysis is like giving a student a test but not grading it. Something may not look right, in fact you may spot something you know is in proper, but it is almost impossible to properly emphasize and properly adjust management without evaluating health, or other performance areas, within realistic goals and long-term organizational goals. We commonly keep records that are very little value in make management decisions. For record analysis to yield useful information, think about the type of information needed. Design records with the end in mind ... what does management need to know and how can observations be recorded that will provide analyzable information useful in making decisions.