



TECH TALK

Considerations for the Upcoming Weaning Season

Article Provided By:



Foundation of herd health starts with calves, and calf health starts with nutrition to support immune function and growth:

It's that time of year when spring calves will soon be weaned, and new cattle will be entering stocker and feedlot operations. Getting them started on the right nutrition program will have a significant impact on how well they perform, which directly impacts your profitability. Here's how to help cattle make a smooth transition to their new environment:

1.) Waiting to process until cattle have had a chance to rest and recover from their trip.

During the receiving period, cattle undergo a change in diet, environment, are hauled, have feed and water withheld, commingled, and they might also be vaccinated, and implanted among other things. All of this causes a disturbance in the rumen. The ultimate results of these stressors are:

- Severely disrupted rumen bacterial balance
- Reduced rumen bacterial populations to only 10-25% of normal
- Decreased rumen fermentative ability by 85-90%

Cattle can also suffer significant weight loss, losing more than half a percent of body weight for every 100 miles of transport. Calves that lose more than seven percent of body weight are at a high-stress level and at higher disease risk, which can also have a negative effect on rumen function. To reduce stress, avoid processing cattle immediately upon arrival. A good rule of thumb is to let calves rest one hour for each hour of time they spent on the truck before they are run through a chute again for processing. Keep them comfortable in a pen that protects them from the elements, and is clean, dry, and well-bedded. Have a sufficient supply of fresh water available and located where it can be easily found. Do not start them on a grain within the first 24 hours and make long-stem grass hay and palatable feed readily available to get their rumen going again. Give calves about a foot of bunk space per head.

2.) Get rumen functioning and acclimated to new ration. Use a drench product that supports active rumen microbial growth and efficiency.

Getting cattle acclimated to a new ration is a big deal. Consider starting them off on long-stem hay to get the rumen going again. The primary goal is to get cattle eating and to get them healthy. The goal is not only to maximize gain, but intake. Depending on their history, background, and size, this will dictate how quickly you can take cattle onto feed. Some cattle require a slower uptick, some can be faster, but ultimately, producers should work with their nutritionist to decide. Keep in mind, it's important to hedge on the side of caution. Be sure to feed cattle twice a day and keep an eye out on those higher risk cattle who aren't coming up to the bunk to eat. In order to get rumen function moving in the right direction, producers should consider starting at processing by drenching calves with an immune health support product. Use a product designed to naturally balance rumen microbiota and optimize the rumen environment. A drench is usually a one-time deal, administered when cattle are processed that first day.

There is incredible value in incorporating a drench. Not only can it provide a way to get vital nutrients that will help jumpstart rumen microbes and rumen activity, but it can also provide immunity benefits to keep cattle on a higher state of health, and drive cattle to eat at the bunk, especially those who are more hesitant. In the end, healthy rumen function translates into better performing cattle.

3.) Creating a ration that allows time for cattle to transition to a new diet and including ingredients that support immune function.

New arrivals will eat poorly for the first few days until they become accustomed to their new surroundings, their new pen mates, and a new ration. Abrupt changes in feed such as introducing too much grain too quickly or putting cattle out into lush pastures disrupt rumen function. Feed good quality grass and a transition starter ration with products that stimulate rumen function and support active immunity. Including an immune support product in the ration will help feed the microbes in the rumen and restore the microbial population. The result - consistent feed intake, optimal rumen, and overall health and rumen function. Think of it like this. The drench and the immune support product are a one, two punch to the program. A drench is the original dose, then the immune ingredients keep that healthy rumen balanced and functioning for optimal intake and performance moving forward.

All incoming cattle will experience stress of some kind. This stress can damage the microbial population in the rumen, as well as depress rumen function. Steps that can be taken to lessen stress in newly received cattle, as well as to help them recuperate, will pay extra in terms of improved health and performance. By increasing the palatability of the feed, stimulating the microbial population in the rumen through a drench provided at processing, creating a ration that allows time for cattle to transition to a new diet by including immune support ingredients, and increasing feedstuff digestibility, a smoother transition can be made to get cattle started on the right track.