



Dawson Creek Veterinary Clinic

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Keeping your Back Grounded Calves Healthy

If your fall marketing decision involves retaining weaned calves, keeping heifer replacements, or purchasing calves for feeding there are simple ways to ensure maximum feedlot health. Basically we need to think of these calves as walking immune systems that have to be nourished in order to fight off diseases which are common throughout the weaning and initial feeding period of the animal.

First, calves are only as strong as the cow herd in which they originated. Excellent cow vaccination programs, cow herd nutritional status, herd genetics and general husbandry are all very important factors which affect the immune status of the weaned calf you plan to feed successfully. Calves purchased from well vaccinated cow herds have been protected in gestation from diseases and receive colostrum rich in antibodies. The herd nutritional status also affects the quality of the colostrum and vigour of the newborn. Numerous studies have confirmed that calves receiving too little colostrum at birth are far more prone to succumbing to feedlot disease. Once again we see how important nutrition is.

Stress is another detrimental factor when dealing with post weaning sickness in calves. Studies have shown the most profound stress on these calves is mixing. The weaning process itself, transportation, feed changes, and new environment are all considerable stresses. However, removing a calf from its herd mates and mixing him with other calves has been proven to be the largest contributor to stress. Therefore, those of you whom are retaining your own ranch raised calves are already winning and if you are purchasing calves try to buy single source calves from a well fed, highly vaccinated herd.

A good vaccination program for the calves is also very important. Ideally calves should receive two sets of vaccines prior to weaning. Processing these calves at branding and pre-weaning is probably the Cadillac program that can fit some operations. If a pre-weaning round-up and processing is not possible the second 'booster' can be put at weaning. However the stress factor comes into play again and these newly weaned calves may not respond as well to a vaccine during this very stressful time. Prevention programs and stress management will help decrease shipping fever, and antibiotic use in these calves.

A good nutritional program is vital to allow these calves to consume enough energy during a low consumption period to maintain a healthy immune system.

Our veterinarians will be more than happy to consult you with the appropriate program which fits your needs. Please give us a call and we will set up a herd health plan with you.