

# Adding More Value To Feeder Calves Requires Beyond The Traditional Says Extension Livestock Specialist

MT. VERNON, Mo.

**T**here are a variety of ways that livestock producers can add value to their operation. Producers typically mention things like de-horning, deworming, castrating, vaccinating, using good bulls and feeding grain after weaning as the steps taken to add value.

“These are practices many feeder calf producers include in their protocol for marketing a calf

List “breed sourced” information since a number of breeds have special program for progeny out of their bulls. These calves may be marketed at special sales.

Consider selling your calves as “all-natural.” There are several marketing opportunities for calves meeting these strict criteria such as no implants and no antibiotics. “If you don’t normally use these practices, it could be another



**(Above) Doing the field paperwork for the age and source program.**

**(Photo of Right) Tagging a newborn for identification purposes that will add value when marketed.**

Photo by Eldon Cole, livestock specialist with MU Extension.

crop. Those practices make up the basics of most pre-conditioning program which the beef industry has recommended since the 1960’s,” said Eldon Cole, a livestock specialist with University of Missouri Extension.

However, Cole says there are other subtle management practices that might pull a bid or two more out of discriminating order buyers.

For example: wean calves 28, preferably 45 days, prior to marketing day.

Test calves and find them all negative for BVD-PI. Some buyers may do this when they process the calves while others question the need for this ear-notch test.

Guarantee that heifer calves are open since as many as 30 percent of heifer calves are bred in herds that do not “pull-the-bull.” This practice should have minimal cost.

Age and source verified your calves. This verification program of birth dates and point of origin appeals to buyers as it could give them a \$35 or so payoff when those cattle are slaughtered.

chance to get some extra bids if the right buyers are at the sale,” said Cole.

Try marketing in larger groups by commingling at the market or with neighbors who breed and manage their herd in a similar fashion. “Buyers routinely pay more for larger drafts of uniform calves. This approach helps small herds or those with uneven calves due to a long calving season or mixed breeds of calves,” said Cole.

Use a brand because a distinctive brand on an attractive set of calves can draw more bids as it shows pride of ownership. Cole says buyers may equate branding and distinctive ear tags to calves that come from a well-managed farm.

“Adding value is of little value however if you don’t communicate with your marketing agency what your calves have that may not be detectable visually to those in the buyer’s seats. Be sure to talk to your marketers well ahead of sale day so they may be able to contact potential bidders for your calves,” said Cole. Δ