

Spring Practices That Add Value To Feeder Cattle

DR. JAMES B. NEEL

KNOXVILLE, TENN.



Some basic spring management practices are moneymakers, and these should be routine for Tennessee cow-calf producers who want to add value to or make more money from their calf crop. These practices include dehorning, castrating

bull calves, and implanting the calf crop with growth stimulants. These tasks require very little, if any, added cost. The return would be great under the current market environment. Feeder calf market prices have been predicted to be around \$1.57 per pound this fall.

Marketing feeder cattle that are either dehorned or polled adds value. A small number of horned calves are marketed today compared to previous years because of the use and popularity of polled bulls. But those that are sold with horns are of lower value. Generally, horned calves sell for \$1.50 to \$2 per hundredweight less on Tennessee auctions. As the cattle become older, the discount becomes greater. Cattle that are dehorned post-weaning experience reduced performance, lowered immunity to disease, and become sick and die. So, why would a producer not be interested in earning an extra \$10 per head for almost no expense? Get this job done this spring while the calves are young and will not experience the stress of dehorning that older, heavier calves do.

Marketing bull calves produces a greater reduction in market price than does selling calves with horns. Bull calves may be discounted \$3 to \$5 per hundredweight compared to similar

weight and grade steers. Producers who market bull calves offer the argument that “bulls will gain faster, put on more weight, be heavier at marketing, and make more money” than steer calves. This assumption is not correct. As the bulls increase in weight and become older, castration becomes a greater stress on both the animals and producer. Castrating the bulls post-weaning and as they arrive at the feedlot or stocker operation results in increased sickness, reduced performance and death in many cases. It should be easy to recognize why bulls sell for less and why steers sell for more money. Bottom line: castrating bull calves improves the market price and returns.

Another spring practice that should be done is implanting calves with a growth stimulant. Results from 107 on-the-farm demonstrations conducted in Tennessee produced an average of 21 extra pounds with a single implant. What would 20 extra pounds be worth when the calves are sold? Recall the previous prediction of feeder calf prices in fall 2013. With the 21 extra pounds and the predicted price, for this fall, implanting would produce more than \$30 extra return. The cost of the implant would be less than \$2.

The practices covered in this article should be routine and part of a total management program that adds value to the calf crop. These practices have been around and recommended for several decades, yet only a small percentage of the producers take advantage of their economic impact. Δ

DR. JAMES B. NEEL: Professor/Department of Animal Science, UT Extension Beef Cattle Specialist, University of Tennessee

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