For Immediate Release
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October is Beef Quality Assurance Month!

October is Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) month – a time to recognize the importance of the Beef Quality Assurance program to ensuring safe, nutritious beef that is raised responsibly for our consumers. Beef farmers who are BQA certified have been trained in best management practices that improve the safety and quality of beef. During October trainings will be held across the state to encourage more beef producers to enroll in the program. For more information and to locate a training in your area visit the Cattlemen’s Corner on the New York Beef Council website www.nybeef.org. This article provides a sample of the management practices that BQA covers.

PRECONDITIONING CATTLE IS ANIMAL WELFARE
By Dr. Mike Baker, Cornell University

Preconditioning of feeder cattle to prepare them for movement to the next enterprise is an important BQA principle. First and foremost it is an animal welfare issue. Cattle that are sold direct off the cow without any preparation is a stressor that puts them at greater risk of getting sick. Cattle that get sick require antibiotics, which the beef industry is trying to reduce relative to expense, resistance and consumer perception. Additionally, it’s been well documented that cattle that get sick don’t perform well in the finishing phase and have reduced carcass quality. On average around 2–4% of cattle die post weaning. This could be cut drastically if these cattle has been properly prepared for the next phase off the cow.

Preconditioning consists of three management practices that work together to reduce stress thereby increasing the immune status of the young calf.

1. **Vaccination/health management.**
   a. Vaccines assist the calf in fighting diseases that are for the most part resident in the animal itself – though many of them are contagious and can be spread between animals. Building immunity begins with assuring the calf gets colostrum from a well vaccinated dam. Cows that are not
vaccinated will not have the same level of immunoglobulins as vaccinated cows. At a minimum cows should be vaccinated for IBR, PI3, BVD, BRSV and Leptospirosis. At a minimum calves should be vaccinated for:

i. IBR, PI3, BVD, and BRSV
ii. Mannheimia haemolytica
iii. Pasteurella multocida
iv. 7 Way Clostridium

b. Additional vaccines to consider would be:

i. Histophilus somnus
ii. Lepto 5

c. Internal & external parasite control. Calves that are burdened by parasites have a reduced immune system.

d. To assure the most effective immune response calves should be boostered (if required) at least 30 days prior to movement. If killed vaccines are used, they require a booster. If not boostered, then they are worthless.

2. **Weaning.** Separation from the dam is a high stress event. Therefore if the immune system is not prepared as described above, disease causing viruses and bacteria have a much easier time overcoming animal health. Low stress weaning practices such as fence line weaning have shown some success in reducing stress.

3. **Nutrition.** Calves that have had only mom’s milk, grass and water out of a pond are further stressed when they are expected to eat stored forage, grain and drink water from a tub. Ideally transitioning calves to their new diet occurs prior to weaning.

Preconditioning is not only good for the calf and good for the pocketbook, it is the right thing to do. As BQA producers, this practice should be as common place as checking fence and feeding your cows.

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