Importance of Pre-arrival Management Practices to Operators of U.S. Feedlots[1]

Pre-arrival management practices can help reduce death loss and cattle sickness in feedlots. Implementing these practices in the early stages of the production process can help improve the resistance of cattle to infectious disease before they arrive in feedlots. By identifying which pre-arrival practices are most important to feedlot operators, suppliers and other industry stakeholders can focus on the practices that are most beneficial and that might be financially rewarding. In addition, when feedlot cattle suppliers are aware of feedlot operators' priorities, the health of the animals during the feeding phase and their subsequent growth can be optimized.

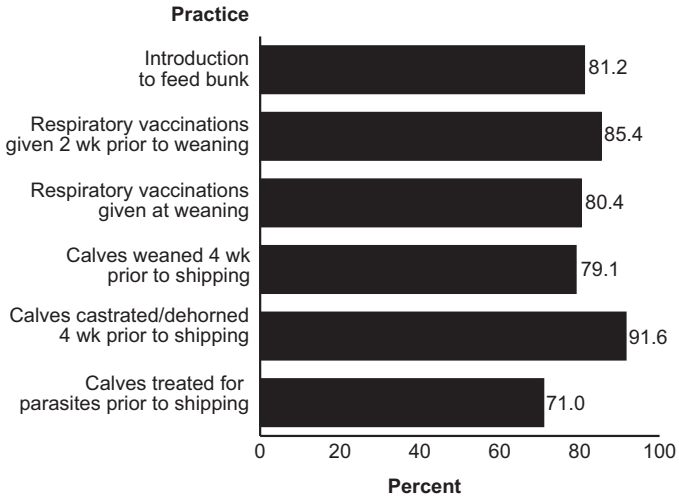
The U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS) conducted the Feedlot 2011 study, an in-depth look at large feedlots (1,000 head or more capacity) in 12 States[2] and small feedlots (fewer than 1,000 head capacity) in 13 States.[3]

Large feedlots accounted for 82.1 percent of the January 1, 2011, inventory of feedlot cattle in all U.S. feedlots but only 2.8 percent of all feedlots. The 12 participating States accounted for over 95 percent of the inventory of cattle in large feedlots (NASS, "Cattle on Feed" February 18, 2011). Small feedlots accounted for 16.0 percent of the inventory on all U.S. feedlots and 92.9 percent of all U.S. farms with cattle on feed. The 13 participating States accounted for 85.4 percent of U.S. farms with fewer than 500 cattle on feed and 90.5 percent of the inventory on farms with fewer than 500 cattle on feed (NASS, 2007 Census of Agriculture). Study results presented in this information sheet reflect only large feedlots,[4] which were divided into two groups: those with a capacity of 1,000 to 7,999 head and those with a capacity of 8,000 or more head.

As part of the NAHMS Feedlot 2011 study, operators were asked to assess a list of six pre-arrival management practices as extremely effective, very effective, somewhat effective, or not effective for reducing sickness or death loss. All six listed pre-arrival management practices were deemed to be extremely or very effective by at least 71.0 percent of feedlots (figure 1).

The practice perceived by feedlot operators to be the most effective was castrating and dehorning calves at least 4 weeks prior to shipping (91.6 percent of feedlots). Treating calves for external or internal parasites prior to shipping was believed to be extremely or very effective by the lowest percentage of feedlots (71.0 percent). These results show that all listed pre-arrival practices have perceived importance, but some are thought to be more important than others.

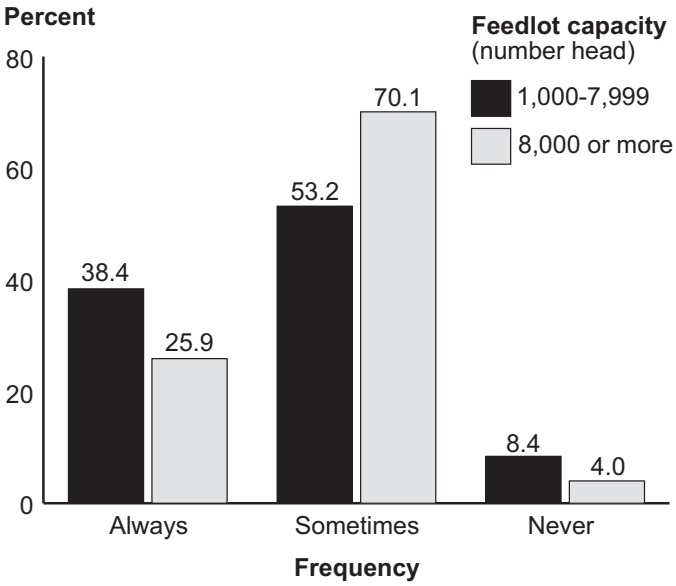
Figure 1. Percentage of feedlots in which the feedlot operator believed that the following pre-arrival management practices were extremely or very effective



The majority of feedlot operators sometimes received pre-arrival information on incoming cattle; however, a substantial percentage still lacked access to such information (figure 2). Operators on a higher percentage of feedlots with a capacity of 1,000 to 7,999 head (38.4 percent) reported always having access to pre-arrival information compared with 25.9 percent of operators on feedlots with a capacity of 8,000 or more head. Overall, operators on 53.2 percent of feedlots with a capacity of 1,000 to 7,999 head and 70.1 percent of feedlots with a capacity of 8,000 or more head were sometimes given information on pre-arrival practices. From these data, it is apparent that limitations still exist when attempting to pass information on pre-arrival practices to feedlots, especially for feedlots with a capacity of 1,000 to 7,999 head.

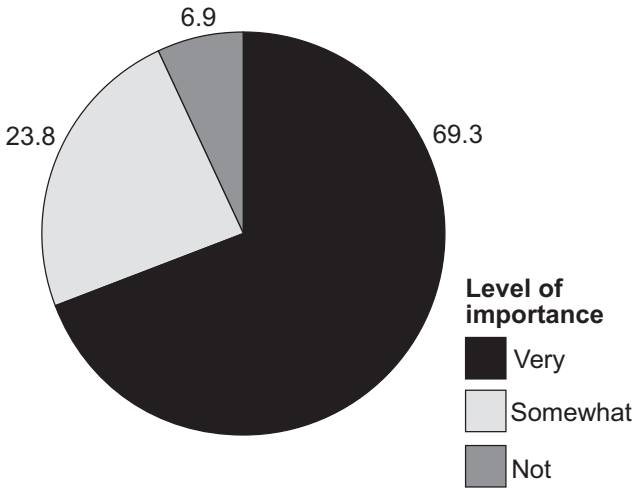
[1] Feedlots with a capacity of 1,000 head or more.
[2] Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, Washington.
[3] Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Texas, Wisconsin.
[4] Information on small feedlots is available at: http://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/nahms/feedlot/index.shtml

Figure 2. Percentage of feedlots by frequency that pre-arrival information for cattle placed on feed was available, and by feedlot capacity



Operators on 69.3 percent of all feedlots believed that pre-arrival processing information was very important (figure 3). These findings are consistent with the belief that these pre-arrival practices help to support the health and well-being of feedlot cattle through decreased sickness and death loss at the feedlot. Operators on an additional 23.8 percent of all feedlots believed that information on pre-arrival processing was somewhat important. From these data, it is apparent that feedlot operators find great value in pre-arrival information.

Figure 3. Percentage of feedlots by level of importance feedlot operator placed on pre-arrival proccessing information



Summary

Operators on feedlots with a capacity of 1,000 or more head believed that pre-arrival processing was extremely or very effective in reducing sickness and death loss of cattle in feedlots. Castrating and dehorning calves at least 4 weeks prior to shipping was deemed by 91.6 percent of feedlot operators as a very or extremely effective pre-arrival practice.

Although feedlot operators believed that pre-arrival management practices were crucial to the health of animals, information on pre-arrival processing was not always available to operators. Operators on only 34.7 percent of all feedlots always had pre-arrival information available. This finding might reflect the challenge of moving data/information with shipped cattle, especially when many smaller groups of cattle are involved. Furthermore, the cost of transmitting data with the animals may be higher than the cost differential between those with and without data on pre-arrival management.

Improving the percentage of feedlots that always have pre-arrival information available should be an area of focus. Working with the different groups involved in the marketing channels to improve communication and consistency is one way that improvements can be made. In addition, developing a more systematic method of transferring data when the ownership of cattle is transferred from the supplier to the feedlot might help to increase the availability of pre-arrival processing information, which could improve the health of feedlot cattle in feedlots, a major concern for owners and consumers.

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