

Making the commitment to prevention

If you stay in the beef business, make the commitment to preventive medicine



Vaccinations costs about \$6 per head, while medication to treat a sick animal usually ends up costing from \$10 to \$30 per head

by MAC LITTLEJOHN

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IN THESE TIMES of economic dismay and uncertainty in the beef industry, producers must decide which path to take.

Do they bear down, hold on tight and weather the current storm? Or, do they pass on the torch leaving the battle for others to fight? As farmers, you need to ask yourself this question in order to do your farm a favour.

If you are committed to this industry and to your cattle, then you need to have standard operating procedures in place. Taking short cuts to reduce certain production costs will only come back to haunt you in decreased productivity.

These procedures or protocols should encompass all stages of your operation (calving pens, pasture management, whole herd vaccination, mineral

supplementation, etc.).

From a veterinary perspective, the vaccinating of calves for BRSV, BVD, IBR, PI3, Clostridia, Pasteurella and Haemophilus pay back huge dividends in non-treatment costs.

All it takes is a pneumonia outbreak for dollars to be lost in medications, labour, lost productivity and death losses. The cost of the vaccine for all the above diseases about \$6/head. The cost of medication to treat a sick animal ranges anywhere from \$10 - \$30/head depending on the severity and/or drugs used. The same can be said for other diseases or management practices such as bull testing.

I have spoken about this in the past but the reality is, the majority of beef herds in Ontario do not perform Breeding Soundness Evaluations (BSE) on their bulls prior to pasture turnout. This is a potential disaster waiting to happen. Remember these facts:

- Fertility is 10 times more important than carcass quality and five times as important as daily gain

- The greatest loss economically is delayed conception across the herd, in that for every 21 days a cow stays open there is an estimated loss of 50-60 lbs of weaning weight for the following year.

- No member of the herd impacts fertility in greater significance than the bull(s)

- 18 to 30 per cent of bulls are subfertile in their ability to service cows either because of poor semen quality, their libido or their general health

Yearling bulls are as fertile as two-year-old bulls (with a bull to cow ratio of 1:25)

- Larger testicular size increases probability of a satisfactory breeder.

If you talked to western producers who had to decide between testing bulls in the spring or pregnancy checking cows in the fall they would all choose the bulls.

Checking the cows is roughly twice the cost of the bulls for an 80-cow herd. And the larger the herd, the cheaper it is to check the bulls

relative to the cows.

If you are still not convinced, try this analogy. What is more important to the success of a road trip, checking fluid levels before you leave or checking fluid levels when you get back?

Pregnancy (open) checking is important, however it is retrospective. It only allows us to see how the last six to seven months went. BSE's on bulls is insurance you should not do without.

Lastly, try to establish a relationship with a veterinary clinic that has a genuine interest in bovine medicine. This interest creates the expertise that you need to improve your operation year after year. Do not hesitate to ask your vet questions, because we all benefit from learning and it will help instil the confidence you have with your vet.

At this day and age it is hard to raise thousands of pounds of beef economically. It is even harder to do it without standard operating procedures. *leaf*