

Finding Sick Cattle Early

It's a hard fact of life. Despite the best of efforts, arrival cattle still get sick (mostly from pneumonia). Finding and treating these cattle as soon as possible improves their chances for recovery and profitability.

The following management practices are used by cattle feeders and veterinarians to identify sick cattle early:

- * Walk in or around the pen immediately after the cattle arrive. They will quickly get used to being checked for shipping fever without getting excited.
- * Temperature cattle when processing, and treat those that register 104 * Watch for excessive licking of the nose, which is a sign of fever.
- * Observe feed intakes closely. Feed intake will drop almost 50 percent about 24 hours before an animal's temperature begins to rise.
- * Make sure all cattle have been checked and treated by 10 a.m. each morning. By afternoon even healthy cattle appear sluggish and hard to distinguish from sick ones.
- * Listen for a soft, repetitive cough, and look for calves that have a slight increase in respiration rate.
- * Look for calves that appear gaunt, depressed, have drooping ears, dull watery eyes, don't groom themselves, and/or have a clear nasal discharge.
- * Look for sick calves that hide among other cattle or in a corner.
- * Watch how the cattle move. Sick cattle will have a short, stiff, sluggish stride, often slightly dragging their toes or knuckles as they walk.
- * Observe cattle at the morning feeding and treat those slow getting to the bunk. If cattle are lying down make them stand up.
- * If fewer than 80 percent of cattle are responding to treatment within three days they are not they are not being spotted soon enough.

In summary, finding and treating a calf within 48 hours of the onset of sickness greatly improves chances for survival and profitability. When in doubt, treat. Don't wait until the calf is showing obvious signs of sickness. Work with your veterinarian to make sure you have an effective treatment strategy in place before the cattle arrive.