

Weaning and Receiving Management:

Maintain Good Rumen Function in Times of Stress

Minimizing stress is a major goal when processing newly weaned calves or cattle received off a truck. Reduction of stress and how soon cattle get back on feed will determine the animal's future growth, performance and profitability. If the calves get off to a good start during the first 10 to 14 days after weaning, health issues can be reduced, and performance improved.

The first 30-45 days after weaning is usually the most stressful period of the calf's life and is one of the biggest factors that determines the calf's performance during the weaning period and often for the rest of its life. Separation from mother and shipment to unfamiliar locations place a great deal of stress on the animal both nutritionally and emotionally. Stress symptoms start with loss of appetite, off-feed and digestive issues. In addition, health can deteriorate, immune function can be compromised, and the animal often gets sick. In fact, most of the sickness and death loss due to respiratory disease happens at this time affecting over 10% of feedlot animals. Cattle that recover may never gain as expected and usually grade lower than the healthy cattle.

Nutritional Challenges during Weaning and Receiving

Weaning and receiving cattle experience unique nutritional challenges compared to the other phases of a calf's life. Proper nutritional management during this phase is critical to optimal success and profitability. These calves will likely have experienced low feed and water intake for several days. Some cattle may be unaccustomed to feed, hay, or drinking water from a tank. Due to the likelihood of low feed intake, receiving diets should be formulated to be highly palatable to encourage consumption, and provide a concentrated source of essential nutrients. **Pacer Technology, Murtaugh Idaho, has introduced Excell®, an all-natural lactobacillus fermentation product, to support rumen function, intake and performance and is an excellent product for the weaning, receiving and feedlot cattle.**

Maintain Good Rumen Function

A management objective of all weaning and receiving programs should involve a nutritional program that addresses the maintenance of good rumen function in the cattle before, during and after the stressful periods. Many of the higher quality commercial weaning rations and pre-conditioners on the market are formulated



with components that promote rumen function and support the rumen micro-flora. Farm mixed rations can be just as good as the commercial variety when formulated with similar ingredients and additives such as **Excell® which is a proven product for maintaining good rumen function and appetite which is critical for stimulating appetite and optimal growth.**

Forage quality is also an important element of the nutrition program for maintaining rumen health and function of weaned and receiving calves. The quality of the forage will determine the amount and type of additional protein and energy supplementation, vitamins and minerals needed to meet the animal's nutrient requirements and production goals.

Feeding the Rumen Micro-flora during Times of Stress

To optimize productivity and prevent sickness in stressed cattle, management of rumen health is very important especially during the weaning, receiving and feedlot programs. The rumen relies on a diverse population of microflora that ferment and digest the feed material, produce microbial protein and volatile fatty acids which supply most of the animal's protein and energy needs.

When stress or an upset occurs, cattle can go off feed and can become acidotic. The pH level in the rumen drops and the microbial population (fiber digesters) are significantly reduced, fiber digestion decreases, nutrient absorption is reduced, and the lining of the rumen can be damaged from the low pH. If the cattle are on diets with a higher forage content, they will resume normal intake faster and have less of a reduction in rumen pH than those on a low to moderate forage diet.

Support the Growth of Fiber-Digesting Microorganisms

Since the rumen micro-flora digests most of the animal's feed components, the ration or supplement should provide the nutrients and additives needed to support the large microbial population, especially the fiber-digesting microorganisms. Sufficient rumen degradable protein (RDP) should be fed for microbial protein production. Microbial protein is the highest quality protein for the calf, so we want to optimize its production in the rumen. **Excell® In vitro studies have shown significantly higher numbers of rumen microorgan-isms for microbial protein synthesis and volatile fatty acid (VFA) production for energy efficiency.**

Importance of an Optimal Rumen pH

Good rumen function and fiber digestibility requires a pH of 6.2 to 7. When the pH drops to below 6.0 to 6.2, fiber digestion begins to decline and at 5.8 to 5.9, it has mostly stopped, and the animal is usually in an acidotic state. Cud chewing generates large amounts of saliva, rich in sodium bicarbonate for neutralizing acid production in the rumen, but if the forage (roughage) level or length is inadequate or the grain level is too high, the acid production can proceed at a rate faster than saliva production buffering can control.

Bottom Line

Remember, when feeding cattle, you are really, feeding the rumen microbes ingredients needed for their multiplication and growth to maintain a healthy and functional rumen. What you feed will dictate animal performance, health and profitability on each group of cattle. **University research trials indicate Excell® all-natural lactobacillus fermentation product will provide the gain, efficiency and rumen function needed in weaning, receiving and feedlot cattle.**

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