

# Herd Health & Nutrition

## *The Impact on Production and Total Herd Value*

**A**s the February winter weather drags on, most producers look forward to the fresh faces of new baby calves being born, greening pastures, and warming days. It's the time of year for renewal, new beginnings, and getting excited about what lies ahead for the New Year.

This is an awesome time that I have always looked forward to...don't we all wish every boy and girl could experience the joy of new life in agriculture! Wow, what a difference it might make to the livestock industry in general....well enough of my soap box, what we are talking about is herd health or factors which can impact or be a result from herd health.

There are many technical experts in both academia and industry that can provide volumes of research and reasoning for making herd health a critical element in your production system. However, I would like to turn from strictly herd health to include the importance of nutrition to support a herd health program. Production at the ranch is important but there are other reasons for a good herd health program. Overall herd health is impacted by good herd nutrition and thus to the point of this article, carcass or meat quality.

It is no secret that for animals and humans to receive the most long lasting benefits and effects from a health regimen, nutritional balance is absolutely critical. There are volumes of research which prove that if an animal's nutritional state is not balanced and sufficient, the best health care in the world doesn't return the best possible results.

Now I know what some of you are thinking... you manage and balance health with nutrition along with regional issues unique to your ranch, but it's the next guy who screws up your hard work. For today's sake, let's not worry about that for now....instead we will focus on what you can control which affects our cattle's performance for the "next guy or the buyer". The performance of your cattle will speak volumes about your attention to detail.

Speaking of attention to detail; let me get specific on what I am talking about and what you need to make sure you are taking actions to measure and then "micro manage". Nutritionally speaking, it is the attention to little details that really matter. These would include details about deficiencies of minerals identified by soil samples from each pasture and hair samples of your cows, bulls, and calves. This should be done before you go to pasture and at weaning if possible.

Knowing these specifics should change how you match any deficiencies to your vitamin / mineral supplement package. Any improved performance from this effort plus the complement of your available feed stuffs is money in your pocket.

These measures should not be a onetime discovery process; rather a

continual measurement woven into your management system. Manage from measurements, no guessing needed. Over time you will have a much better "feel" of what changing conditions mean and how you supplement for them, such as excess moisture versus drought, different ages of your cows, body score condition when going to pasture, etc. You know the list.

Right about now you are thinking: what is the point of all of my rambling. Well it is from my years of experience with many ranchers from all across the U.S. that these measurements have unlocked many frustrating mysteries.



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marcine Moldenhauer, Owner and President of Meat=Link Management, a Livestock and Meat Business Consulting Firm; Contact Information: Wichita, Kansas 67230, Office 316-733-8506, [marcine\\_moffice@att.net](mailto:marcine_moffice@att.net)

There are countless producers that I

have spent

hours with, laboring over why their cattle didn't perform like expected at the ranch, feeding and carcass. I don't mean to infer that all of them fed their own cattle, rather pointing out that they have a mind set of sharing what they do and know with their buyers and only look for buyers of their cattle that will share data back.

Having bought, fed, and worked with alliances who have a strict mission

to work with producers like the people I am referring to above, I know that the value placed on producers having health and nutrition records ranks as high, if not higher, than knowing all of the detail around the expected genetic potential.

WHY? Mostly because the long term impact on cattle performance from substandard or poorly balanced health and nutrition management has far reaching and irreversible impacts to the "overall P & L". From this experience, I have watched and learned that the answers to performance problems were directly related to a mineral imbalance at the pasture level. Simple soil and hair samples revealed serious deficiencies which were easily and relatively quickly corrected.

The amazing part of these stories is that these ranches started experiencing dramatic improvements in cow pregnancy rates, number of live calves born, increase in pounds of calves weaned, and cows maintaining a higher body condition on virtually the same amount or less feed.

In closing, the message is very clear, herd health is very important, but don't forget to include a well balanced, smartly managed nutrition program as well....one without the other will result in average results compared to what is possible. ■

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