

**Cattle implants can pay great dividends**

As the global demand for food rises with the population, technologies that extend the growth curve in cattle are more important than ever. Implants are one of the greatest cost-to-benefit ratio management technologies available to beef producers. When combined with a sound cattle health program, implants can turn extra gain into extra dollars.

**Research shows implants boost profits**

Growth implants, delivered through a pellet under the skin in the animal's ear, enhances the naturally occurring hormones in the animal. Natural and synthetic hormones are slowly released from the implant into the animal’s blood stream, elevating the blood hormone levels to stimulate muscle growth and decrease fat deposits.

Actual improvements in weight gain and feed conversion will depend on many factors, but research indicates that implants improve the weaning weight of beef calves by as much as 23 pounds. With more than 90 percent of calves eventually implanted at the feedlot, producers not implanting suckling and growing calves are leaving money in the pasture.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Maximizing herd health increases value of implant**

While implanting calves requires some additional labor, the benefits easily outweigh the extra effort. In order to reap the rewards, simple steps can be taken to ensure the implant can offer its full value.

* Clean and disinfect the implant injection site. Punching through a dirty ear can introduce bacteria under the skin and cause infection. It’s important to take necessary steps to ensure that the injection site is clean and fecal matter is removed from the implant area. Apply a disinfectant solution to the implant injection site surface of the ear and use a clean implant needle to get the best results.
* Follow proper implanting procedures. Improperly placed implants can lead to poorer gains and economic loss. The implant should be inserted in the middle one-third of the ear and midway between the two main cartilage ribs of the ear. It should be inserted under the skin (subcutaneous) and not buried in the cartilage of the ear. Implanting at other locations may decrease implant effectiveness, cause an abscess or damage the implant.
* Deworm regularly to control internal parasites. There are many worms that infect cattle, including lungworms and intestinal worms. An individual animal may have many of these at once. If not held in check, internal parasites can lead to reduced feed intake and production, resulting in less consumption of energy, protein, vitamins and minerals.
* Focus on nutrition. Implants will not make up for poor nutrition. That’s why cattle must have adequate nutrition before implants can positively influence feed efficiency and growth performance.

**Choosing the right implant is simple**

The key to an effective implant program is to find an implant solution that fits the needs of your operation. From suckling beef calves to weaned pasture steers and heifers, Merck Animal Health offers Ralgro® (zeranol), which stimulates an animal’s natural growth systems to increase weight gain.

Research shows that when calves are implanted with Ralgro, weaning weights increase by an average of 25 pounds.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Do not use in bulls intended for reproduction or dairy animals. Do not use before 1 month of age or after weaning in heifers intended for reproduction.

**Implants reduce the industry’s environmental footprint**

Because the use of implants improves the efficiency of beef production, there is less stress placed on the environment. Faster-growing cattle leave a much smaller carbon footprint because they produce less greenhouse gas, require less land, eat less feed and drink less water over their lifetime. As a result, more land is made available for other uses.

Ralgro helps producers conserve land and water resources. Each wheel of Ralgro saves 22,000 gallons of water and almost 3,700 pounds of feed – allowing producers to leave something even better for the next generation.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**Take home message**

There are several implant options available for cattle at all stages of the production cycle. Producers should visit with their veterinarian and nutritionist to discuss which option is best for their individual operation. When used properly along with a proper management plan, implanting is one of the best investments you can make in the performance of your beef herd.

*Do not attempt to salvage implant site for human or animal food. Implant pellets in the ear only. Any other location is in violation of federal law.**A withdrawal period has not been established for Ralgro® in pre-ruminating calves. Do not use in calves to be processed for veal. For complete information, refer to*[*product label*](https://merckusa.cvpservice.com/product/basic/view/1047168?e=0d5b81afd18c81513116e24a065d3749z1695)*.*

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1. Data on file, Merck Animal Health. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Data on File. Merck Animal Health. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Data derived from: Capper, J. L. 2013. The environmental and economic impact of steroid implant and beta-adrenergic agonist use within U.S. beef production. ADSA/ASAS Joint Annual Meeting held in Indianapolis, IN, USA on July 11th – 15th, 2013. Robert Kallenbach, University of Missouri, published, October 26, 2010 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)