

**Four Pillars of Herd Health Success**

Fall is a busy time of year on the farm. Many decisions need to be made that will impact the coming year. Pastures need to be evaluated for Winter feeding, calves weaned, heifers and cows pregnancy checked, cattle moved, and the entire herd evaluated for any health issues that need to be addressed before Winter.

Healthy cattle are key to the success of any operation and you can address these needs with plans to **control parasites (external and internal), optimize immunity,** and **manage growth**. By following this four-pronged approach to herd health, success can be seen not only in the Fall but also year-round.

**Control External Parasites**

Comfortable cattle are healthy, growing cattle. External parasites such as flies, ticks and lice can increase cattle stress and, thus, threaten the productivity of your herd. Geographic location as well as time of year will dictate what parasite species are impacting your herd. There are several options for controlling these external parasites including:

* Low volume pour-on insecticides that reduce time and labor and have no preslaughter withdrawal and no milk discard times
* Products for beef cattle and calves to control horn flies and lice
* Ear tags and premise products for ectoparasite control

While getting rid of all external parasites may not be realistic, reducing the number can make the cattle more comfortable and more likely to thrive.

**Control Internal Parasites**

Internal parasite control is the cornerstone of an effective herd health program. It's important to understand that a parasite lives two lives: one inside your cattle and one outside. Adult parasites in cattle produce eggs that are passed in manure. The eggs hatch, producing larvae that develop and move up onto the pasture grasses where cattle consume them. Once inside a new host, the process starts over again.

A strategic deworming program based on the worm life cycle reduces the parasite burden in the herd as well as on the pasture. As a rule, cattle should be dewormed after the first frost in the Fall. Lower temperatures mean fewer eggs and larvae survive in the grass. This well-timed deworming will help keep cattle clean up until March or April as well as allow for a parasite-free Winter where they can utilize their feed sources more effectively.

Managing parasites in cattle can be a challenge, especially if the animals are not regularly handled. Fortunately, there are deworming solutions uniquely geared to non-handling operations. Safe-Guard® (fenbendazole) is available in multiple formulations including feed pellets, blocks, mineral, paste and suspension, making it an effective and convenient choice for any cattle operation.

**Optimize Immunity - Vaccinate**

Herd health programs should also include vaccination plans customized to your operation. Keep the following in mind when choosing vaccines and creating a plan:

* Type of operation
* Geographic region
* Previous vaccination history
* Regulatory considerations for export or interstate shipping
* How often new stock are introduced into the herd

Calves often are being weaned in the Fall and co-mingled with other animals, so following up on vaccines given earlier in the year is a good idea to boost immunity.

Cattle also face an increased risk for respiratory diseases, pinkeye and clostridial disease in the Fall. Prevention is crucial. To protect your herd against many of these diseases, look for the Vision® line that offers combination protection against several of the most common clostridial diseases as well as Piliguard® vaccines which have a long-standing reputation of aiding in the control of pinkeye in cattle.

Another option to take the stress out of pinkeye is with a combination vaccine like 20/20 VISION® 7, which offers the trusted clostridial disease prevention of Vision® 7 combined with protection against pinkeye caused by *M. bovis* in one convenient dose.

Work with your veterinarian to determine how to defend your herd against viral or bacterial infections with trusted vaccines.

**Manage Growth**

Implants — small pellets that contain a stimulant released over time — maximize cattle’s weight gain by optimizing the available nutrition. As anabolic agents, implants stimulate weight gain and improve feed efficiency in pasture and feed yard cattle. Implants are available for different stages of growth and are specially designed for specific ages, sex or stage of production.

Implanting nursing calves has consistently shown to be an effective and safe way to post greater calf weights at weaning time. In fact, to increase weaning weights by 20 to 25 pounds per calf, producers should consider implanting calves with a product such as Ralgro® (zeranol). For an investment of approximately $1.50 per head, implants result in a $30 to $40 increase in calf value in today’s market.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Implants are regulated by the Food and Drug Administration and the only FDA-approved location for placement of an implant is the middle third on the back side of the ear, between the skin and the cartilage. Calves should be on a positive plane of nutrition to receive the full benefit of an implant.

**Take home message**

Every season has its challenges and opportunities for keeping your herd healthy. Ensuring that animals are well cared for not only makes good business sense, it’s also important for the health of the animal. Following the four pillars — **control parasites (external and internal)**, **optimize immunity** and **manage** **growth** — along with having a conversation with your veterinarian can help you plan and implement the right program for maintaining the health of your herd.

*IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION: 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)*.*

*IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION: Safe-Guard mineral, feed through products and liquid feed: RESIDUE WARNING: Cattle must not be slaughtered within 13 days following last treatment. For dairy cattle, the milk discard time is zero hours. A withdrawal period has not been established for this product in pre-ruminating calves. Do not use in calves to be processed for veal.*

Copyright © 2019 Intervet Inc., d/b/a Merck Animal Health, a subsidiary of Merck & Co., Inc.

1. Selk, G. (1997) Implants for Suckling Steer and Heifer Calves and Potential Replacement Heifers. Proceedings: Impact of Implants on Performance and Carcass Value of Beef Cattle. Oklahoma State University, P-957. Pg 40.4. Superior Livestock Sale data report 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)