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## Healthy cattle, healthy profits

*Beef cattle experts share expansive database on feedlot health*

Treating cattle for sickness in the feeding phase may be costing more than you thought.

“Of course healthy cattle have lower treatment costs. But they also perform much better in the yard and on the rail. That combination sets up the huge gaps between who makes money feeding cattle and who doesn’t,” says Gary Fike, beef cattle specialist for Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB).

To be exact, those factors lead to a \$190 net difference between cattle treated twice and those that never needed treatment (see Table 1).

Fike shed light on the effect of health treatments on feedlot performance, carcass traits and profitability at the Midwest section meetings of the American Society of Animal Science last month. The information was drawn from Iowa Tri-County Steer Carcass Futurity (TCSCF) data on nearly 50,000 head of cattle fed in 18 Iowa feedlots since 2002.

Cattle that remained healthy during the feeding phase had heavier delivery weights, final weights, stronger gains and fewer days on feed than their treated counterparts. Cattle that were never treated in the feedlot arrived weighing 650 pounds (lb.); those that ended up being treated once weighed 617 lb. and those treated twice entered the yard at 601 lb.

“There’s a lesson in those numbers,” Fike points out. “The cattle that were not treated are a little older and heavier when they arrive, which tells me they spent more time at home being backgrounded and getting all those sickness problems straightened out before they ever left the ranch.”

Darrell Busby, TCSCF manager, presented related research at the meetings. That study focused on the cost of lung adhesions, which data revealed amounts to more than \$40 per head (see Table 2). Busby says that cost is the result of the same issues uncovered in the study of health treatment costs.

**Table 1. Effect of Health Treatments on feedlot performance, carcass traits and profitability**

Item	Number of Times Treated		
	<u>NT</u>	<u>1T</u>	<u>2T</u>
<b>Arrival wt., lb.</b>	650	617	601
<b>Delivery age, days</b>	302.8	274.1	263.9
<b>Final adj. wt., lb.</b>	1183	1155	1133
<b>ADG, lb./day</b>	3.22	3.06	2.93
<b>Days on feed</b>	167.0	177.9	183.7
<b>HCW, lb.</b>	727.3	709.9	698.9
<b>Rib fat, in.</b>	0.45	0.43	0.39
<b>Marbling score</b>	429.4	413.8	395.9
<b>% CAB</b>	18.71	14.36	11.19
<b>Treatment cost, \$/hd</b>	0.00	24.04	61.41
<b>Cost of gain, \$/cwt</b>	61.82	69.09	73.18
<b>Profit, USD/hd</b>	<b>\$52.45</b>	<b>(\$15.16)</b>	<b>(\$137.30)</b>

“The cattle with lung adhesions weigh 8 lb. less than those with none,” he says. “That indicates there are a lot of things that happen prior to the feedlot that cause these lung adhesions.”

In the study, lung adhesions were defined as blemishes that require a knife to remove the lung tissue from the ribcage of the carcass. “Our data is recognizing that these severe cases of lung adhesions, which represent about 4% of the population, are what cause the most damage in terms of lost performance, lighter carcass weights and lower marbling scores,” Busby says.

Cattle with lung adhesions had to be administered health treatments 2.2 times more than those without. Similar to the data Fike presented, Busby says that hike in treatment cost (nearly \$7 more for individual drug treatments) isn’t the only place cattle with lung adhesions lose.

The percentage of carcasses that met *Certified Angus Beef*<sup>®</sup> (CAB<sup>®</sup>) brand acceptance dropped from 18% to 12% when lung adhesions were present. A similar quality drop was found between cattle never treated and those treated twice (19% vs. 11%).

“Those healthy cattle lay on intramuscular fat more easily thanks to that added gain,” Fike says. Noting the significant marbling deposition differences between groups of cattle, he adds, “We know these stress-free, healthy cattle can really bring home the carcass quality. A database of this size is just a big exclamation point at the end of that statement.”

END

**Table 2. Effect of Lung Adhesions on feedlot performance, carcass traits and profitability**

Item	Lung adhesion	
	No	Yes
Arrival wt., lb.	643	635
Final adj. wt., lb.	1176	1160
ADG, lb/day	3.19	3.01
Days on feed	169	176
HCW, lb.	725	703
Rib fat, in.	.44	.43
Marbling score	426.6	410.0
% CAB	18.12	12.46
Treatment costs \$/hd	5.29	12.23
Cost of gain, \$/cwt	63.18	67.27
Profit, USD/hd	<b>\$45.27</b>	<b>\$1.65</b>