

IS IT WORTH YOUR EFFORT AND EXPENSE TO CONSIDER DIFFERENT WEANING STRATEGIES?

CASEY MCMURPHY, PH.D., BEEF NUTRITIONIST AND RESOURCE EDITOR FOR *RED ANGUS WORLD*

It's pretty obvious that abrupt weaning of calves creates distress when you wake up the next day after weaning and there is a calf 3 miles from the corrals. If you have Red Angus cows, it may be the cow that has traveled 3 miles instead of her calf. Even if we can visually see that there is distress we have to understand the impact this has on the calves and then be able to market the mitigation processes that we have to undergo to reduce this stress. At the end of the day, we have to match our production practices with our marketing strategies or market our production practices because it is best for the industry.

the feedlot on the same day. The performance results of this study are shown in Table 1.

Surprisingly, the calves all weighed the same on the day they were shipped to the feedlot regardless of weaning strategy. Therefore, one might interpret these data to suggest that if I am not retaining ownership in the feedlot then I should wean



Table 1. Feedlot performance of calves exposed to non-contact truck weaning, non-contact drylot weaning, and contact pasture weaning strategies

Item	Weaning Treatments			Probability
	Truck	Pasture	Drylot	
No. of Steers	93	92	95	
Pre Ship Weight	555	555	557	0.28
Arrival Weight	536	536	542	0.06
Shrink, %	3.6	3.6	2.9	0.10
Avg. Daily Gain	3.09 ^a	2.87 ^b	1.98 ^c	0.01
Dry Matter Intake	11.7 ^a	12.8 ^b	12.6 ^b	0.01
Feed to Gain	3.33 ^a	5.00 ^b	10.00 ^c	0.01
Morbidity, %	28 ^a	15 ^b	38 ^c	0.03

^{a,b,c}Means within a row with different superscripts are significantly different ($P < 0.05$)

Drylot cattle had less shrink going to the yard and therefore had a reduced ADG.

Researches evaluated 3 independent weaning strategies over a 2 year period and the subsequent impact on feedlot health and performance during the first 28 days on feed (Boyles et al., 2007). To accomplish this, they had 3 weaning strategies, 1) Truck weaned, 2) Fenceline weaning for 7 days followed by 30 days in pasture before shipping and 3) Abrupt, drylot weaning for 30 days prior to shipping to the feedyard. These treatments were structured so that all of the calves left the ranch at the same time and entered

them on the truck because there is no difference in sale weights of calves at the time of delivery to the feedlot. This again is assuming you would sell the calves at the same age regardless of weaning regimen. However, these data demonstrate that if a producer is retaining ownership then contact-pasture weaning can be beneficial to their bottom line by reducing morbidity in the feedlot by 47%, reducing the cost of treatment and potentially mortality. This is also valuable to a feedlot operator who is looking to purchase your calves, but you have to be able to use this information to negotiate a higher price for your cattle in order to get rewarded for your efforts. This study is a good evaluation of these weaning strategies because it compares weaning on a truck to preconditioned calves that are the same age.

In the end, it is our duty to practice animal welfare strategies, but we have to market these efforts. We can challenge research all we want, but this is a very well conducted paper and can be supported on a more basic level. Hickey et al. (2003) actually compared systemic indicators of stress (i.e.

Continued on page 17...

Heartstone Angus, LLC
Silver City, New Mexico

Registered Angus bulls, yearlings, 18-month-olds, 2-year-olds. Raised in the rugged Burro Mts., fit and ready to work. Private treaty sales, or come see us at our READY FOR WORK sale, Belen, NM in March 2013.

(575)313-4028 • cbarranch575@gmail.com

Article made possible by a grant from the Arizona Cattle Industry Foundation

...Continued from page 12 WEANING

cortisol, catecholamines and others) in calves abruptly weaned to those that were still with their dams to evaluate social distress of abruptly weaned calves. These researchers found that abrupt weaning increased physiological measures of stress hormones and stress has been associated with disease susceptibility. This in tandem with placing cattle in a dusty dry-lot setting could potentially explain the increase in morbidity detected in the study by Boyles et al. (2007).

We all know what is right for the cattle, but we have to make it worth our efforts. May all of your efforts be rewarded.

Boyles, S.L., S.C. Loerch, and G.D. Lowe. 2007. Effects of weaning management strategies on performance and health of calves during feedlot receiving. *Prof. Anim. Sci.* 23:637-641.

Price, E.O., J.E. Harris, R.E. Borgwardt, M.L. Sween, and J.M. Connor. 2003. Fenceline contact of beef calves with their dams at weaning reduces the negative effects of separation on behavior and growth rate. *J. Anim. Sci.* 81: 116-121.

Hickey, M.C., M. Drennan, and B. Earley. 2003. The effect of abrupt weaning of suckler calves on the plasma concentrations of cortisol, catecholamines, leukocytes, acute-phase proteins and in vitro interferon-gamma production. *J. Anim. Sci.* 81: 2847-2855.

Red Angus World is a online resource in the cattle and Red Angus community. Specializing in resources, breeder, industry and sire directories, show results and advertising. For more information visit: www.RedAngusWorld.com.

Save the date

February 20, 2013

ACGA Winter Meeting - Phoenix

**Every Load Counts...
and So Do You!**



"We Specialize in Your Hay Needs"

www.wesellhay.com

623-936-4339

modernlivestock merchandising



Livestock Photography

by Rachel Cutrer

Just as any professional photographer works hard to create that unique masterpiece, a good livestock photographer will exert the same amount of effort to create the perfect “pasture-piece”. Today, modern livestock merchandisers have more options than ever in terms of hiring professional photographers, or handling their own imagery needs through utilizing digital cameras and computer photo editing software. A look at these basic tips can help any producer improve their photography skills, thus increasing the value and exposure of their animals.

It is imperative to start with a high quality **camera** for all photography, especially if you plan to use the photos in printed advertising, which requires a higher resolution than online advertising. When choosing a camera, opt for one with the highest number of mega-pixels you can afford. A camera of at least 6.0 megapixels will suffice, but the greater the mega-pixels the higher the quality of the photo. Most professional photographers choose either Nikon or Canon digital cameras with an average of 18.0 megapixels. Depending on the camera you choose, you may consider purchasing a larger lens, other than the standard one that comes with the camera, to assist in greater zoom capabilities. This is especially important if attempting to picture animals in large pastures, where you may not be able to get as close to the animal as you would ideally prefer.

Zooming and cropping are two other important factors. While cropping can be adjusted through photo editing software, a good livestock photographer will fill as much of the frame as possible with the animal, yet still allow ample space on all sides of the animal for sky and grass. Don't zoom in too much however, as you may end up cutting off parts of the animal's body such as their hooves or nose.

Creating a “picture pen” specially made for photographing can greatly improve your process, especially if attempting to capture large numbers of livestock, such as sale animals. For example, an Angus producer may chose to set up a picture pen directly outside their show barn. This would allow the breeder to wash, clip and blow out their animals immediately prior to turning them into the picture pen for that special pose.

When shooting pictures in the pasture, allow time for animals to adjust to your presence. Initially, cattle may move or even run away from you as the photographer. Patience is the key here, as the cattle will eventually settle down and let you work your magic with the camera. It usually isn't recommended to lure the animals with feed or hay, as this generally results in the animals focusing on eating, rather than posing.

Regardless of staging in a pasture or pen, the animal should always be standing with their front-end uphill, or at the very least on a level surface. If photographing haltered animals, try building a slight incline of dirt where the front feet can be placed. All four feet should be visible and in the appropriate positions.

Take notice of the **background** of your photo. While some alterations can be done by using photo editing, avoid having distracting elements behind your animal. Ideally the background should be a simple pasture setting. Avoid telephone poles, cluttered fence lines, barns, or equipment as backgrounds. Also, take into consideration the color of the animal you are photographing. A contrasting background will make the animal stand out more. For example, never choose to shoot an Angus photo in front of a dark colored barn, or a Charolais next to a white barn. Some of the most beautiful livestock images capture an animal against a vibrant blue sky while standing on lush green grass, or on clean shavings or straw. Avoid photographing in dirt lots if possible.

Timing and sunlight are important considerations before attempting a photo shoot. The best results are usually achieved in early morning or late afternoon, when the sun is not quite as bright and there aren't as many shadows. Always shoot with the sun at your back. Pay attention to where shadows may fall; avoid allowing shadows to overcast your animal's body.

Typical livestock photos will show a profile of the animal; however it is becoming increasingly popular to offer a variety of angles such as three-quarter views or front views as additional images of the animal. Before shooting, position yourself at least level with or below the animal's midsection. Most professional livestock photographers take photos while on their knees; this helps make the animal look larger and adequately proportioned.

An often overlooked, but extremely important factor is to have an effective photography assistant, aka your “attention-getter.” Depending on the species, an assistant is crucial in helping insure an animal has its head and ears in the correct position, and maintains an alert appearance during the process. There are a variety of tools available to help your attention-getter accomplish these goals, from mirrors, to noisemakers, to pom-poms and more. In my experience, the best tool, though often embarrassing, is simply to have a real person making animal noises, whistling, or moving their arms. If photographing animals on halter, it is also useful to have another gentle animal available to keep the subject company, and draw its attention.

The importance of quality livestock photography can never be underestimated. Even with the increasing popularity of video, there will always be a need for livestock photography in printed advertising, web sites, and historical reference. When you are able to visualize your livestock, captured forever in a beautiful image, you'll appreciate your efforts. © 2011



Rachel Cutrer, M.S., is president of Ranch House Designs, Inc., a leading national graphic design and communications firm.