

Sooner, better in planning for calf market

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There's no time like the present to develop a game plan on how you will market this year's calf crop.

Corn and freight (fuel) are the two largest variables likely to impact the price you will receive for this year's calf crop.

Unfortunately, there's no certainty where either will be this fall. Fortunately, eastern New Mexico calves are likely to experience smaller freight adjustments due to their proximity to major cattle growing and finishing regions (i.e. central and southern plains) of the U.S. compared to southeastern and western U.S. calves.

All sectors of the beef industry face increased production costs and cattle feed-

ers are intending to minimize risk. Unless a cow-calf producer has ever retained full

or partial ownership in his/her calves through harvest it is difficult to understand how factors such as genetics, pre-weaning calf management, dam nutrition, and stress have on subsequent feedlot performance and profitability.

To improve marketability of this year's calves it will become increasingly important for cow-calf producers to place a larger emphasis on herd management practices

that will reduce risk and increase opportunity for future owners of their calves.

Keys to developing a marketing plan for this year's calf crop include:

- Maximize uniformity (i.e. breed type and weight) in an industry lot size (49,000 pounds: semi-load).

- Implement a complete vaccination program with your veterinarian focused on improving immunity against viral and bacterial pathogens associated with bovine respiratory disease complex (i.e. shipping fever).

- Follow industry recommended standards for animal handling, vaccine storage, and injection site location (i.e. Beef Quality Assurance Guidelines).

- Document your management. Examples include: What products and dosage

were calves treated with? Identify injection site location and the dates products were administered. Document when your first and last calf were born (i.e. Age Verification).

- Estimate the cost of pre-conditioning calves to evaluate feed/grazing options to justify cost-effectiveness.

- Identify a market/program for your calves as soon

as possible. Formal programs that outline specific guidelines (i.e. genetics, management, etc.) and advertise sale lots typically result in more interested buyer/bidders.

Cow-calf producers are encouraged to evaluate their individual situation, explore various marketing options, and make the necessary adjustments in their marketing plan sooner rather than

later. The bottom line is to focus on implementing cost-effective management practices that will positively differentiate your calves and make them more marketable.

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