

DOES PRE-CONDITIONING PAY?

(Article found in Progressive Farmer/September 2001)

Producers often wonder if they will recover the extra costs of labor and medications to prewean and vaccinate their calves. Well, a results demonstration conducted by the Texas Agricultural Extension Service indicates that even without premiums, producers can profit by preconditioning.

Harrison County Extension agent Randy Reeves and Extension beef cattle specialist Todd Thrift supervised the test, conducted with Tom Boone, owner of the Cedar Run Ranch.

Nineteen Charolais-Brangus cross calves (12 steers, seven heifers) from a herd of 119 cows were weaned randomly and weighted on May 19, 1999. Then they were sold the following day to a commission company.

The remaining 100 calves (58 steers, 42 heifers) were separated from their mamas, weighed, processed and moved to a weaning lot. Here they were vaccinated and treated for internal parasites. They also were offered fresh water and bermudagrass hay free choice for five days. Then they were moved to a 33-acre field of coastal bermudagrass. In addition, for the first 14 days after weaning they were hand-fed three pounds of cottonseed meal supplement containing Bovatec, and free-choice mineral supplement was available.

The calves were revaccinated for bovine respiratory diseases two weeks after their first treatment, and cottonseed meal supplement was reduced to two pounds per day. Treatments given included two doses of Pyramid 4 plus Presponse SQ, two doses of Safe-Guard. (The cost of the animal-health products used totaled \$6.77 per head.)

Calves were weighed again on July 10 to establish their final ranch weight. And the next day they were shipped to the Sulphur Springs auction barn to be sold.

The calves that were sold the day after weaning averaged 492 pounds at the ranch but lost 26 pounds of weight by the time they were delivered – an average shrink of 5.3%. At an average sale price of \$93 per cwt., the shrinkage represented a loss of \$24 per head.

The preconditioned calves, however, gained an average of 1.33 pounds per day during their 52-day preconditioning period. Average pay weight with a 2% pencil shrink was 551.6 pounds – more than 83 pounds heavier than their herdmates, which were sold immediately after weaning. The preconditioned calves also brought a higher price (\$97.44 per cwt. on the average).

After subtracting the cost for preconditioning (\$35.29), rancher Boone had netted an additional \$69.84 per head for his efforts. And even if the preconditioned calves had bought the same price, he still would have been ahead by \$44.35 per head.

PRECONDITIONING PAYS BONUS

	Sold Immediately After Weaning	Preconditioned For 52 Days
Number Of Head	19	200
Avg Wean Weight (lbs)	492.2	501
Avg Ship Weight (lbs)	492.2	571.3
Avg Pay Weight (lbs)*	466.3	551.6
GROSS SALES**	\$433.66	\$537.45
Expenses -- Marketing	\$22.97	\$21.63
Expenses -- Preconditioning		\$35.29
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$22.97	\$56.02
NET INCOME	\$410.69	\$480.53
Difference in Income		\$69.84

*Calves sold right after weaning had 5.3% shrink; preconditioned calves, 1.5% plus 2% pencil shrink

**Average sale price for calves sold right after weaning was \$93 per cwt; for preconditioned calves, \$97.44 per cwt