

ALFA



AUSTRALIAN LOT FEEDERS'
ASSOCIATION



SUPPLYING FEMALE CATTLE TO FEEDLOTS

COULD THEY BE PREGNANT?

A FEEDLOT IS NO PLACE FOR A CALF. WORKING TOGETHER, WE CAN ENSURE THAT CALVES ARE BORN WHERE THEY BELONG, IN THE Paddock.

Cattle calving in a feedlot is a welfare concern for the Australian Feedlot Industry. Regardless of whether you are selling heifers/cows direct to a feedlot, through the store market or having them custom fed, it is critical to know their pregnancy status.



Know the pregnancy status of your heifers

IMPACTS OF PREGNANT FEMALES IN FEEDLOTS

The welfare of the cow or heifer, as well as the calf, can be compromised when pregnant females are fed in a feedlot. Pregnant females in a feedlot have decreased average daily gain and poorer feed conversion ratios. Once live weight is adjusted for the weight of the foetus and associated fluids, a decreased dressing percentage and overall lower carcass value is observed, when compared to non-pregnant females.

Heifers that calve while on feed are at risk of requiring calving assistance and suffering secondary complications such as retained placentas, endometritis, calving paralysis and sometimes death. Survival rates of calves born in feedlot pens are reduced if not removed in a timely manner.

ANIMAL WELFARE REQUIREMENTS

The best welfare outcome is achieved when pregnant females do not enter the feedlot.

Many feedlots now have cattle procurement strategies that aim to eliminate the purchasing of pregnant females.

The National Feedlot Accreditation Scheme (NFAS) requires all accredited feedlots that feed female cattle to document and implement a pregnancy and calving management plan, which outlines how they will manage the welfare of cows/heifers and calves, if in the feedlot.

The Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Cattle also requires that the person in charge must ensure the appropriate management of calves born in the feedlot, to ensure the welfare of the calves.

There are several options available to beef producers wishing to supply cattle to feedlots.

OPTION 1: Only supply steers or spayed females to the feedlot, where possible. While this option would eliminate the problem of pregnant females and calving in the feedlot, it is not always practical.

OPTION 2: Pregnancy test heifers or cows before consigning them to the feedlot and ensure you do not consign pregnant females, which is often a more practical option.



Many feedlots successfully feed heifers

Confirming females are not pregnant is now a condition of supplying females to some feedlots. For this reason, it is best to check with your agent or feedlot buyer for their preferred method of pregnancy testing, time frames for testing and what documentation or accreditation may be required from the person conducting the pregnancy testing.

Different states have various requirements about authenticating pregnancy status and who the authentication is conducted by. Vets can provide pregnancy check services. The Australian Cattle Veterinarians Association operate PREGCHECK™, a nationally recognised tail tagging system for the identification and certification of cattle pregnancy status, particularly for sale purposes. In Queensland, in addition to Vets, lay persons can provide authenticated pregnancy diagnosis through either ovarian scanning or pregnancy testing.

If females are detected to be pregnant, an assessment of the stage of pregnancy will assist with decision making.

In some situations, early pregnant (less than four months) females may still be able to be placed onto feed for shorter feeding programs. The risk of a female at this stage of pregnancy calving in the feedlot with a 35-100 day feeding program is minimised and the feedlot may be willing to feed the animal in these circumstances. Again, it is essential to discuss the situation with your agent or feedlot buyer. Females in a more advanced stage of pregnancy are not suitable for feedlot finishing.

PREPARING CATTLE FOR A FEEDLOT

In addition to verifying the pregnancy status of females destined for a feedlot, there are other management practices that can improve the health and performance of cattle that enter feedlots.

Yard weaning – weaning calves in the yards for 5-7 days is a simple and effective procedure that can increase cattle productivity, both on farm and in the feedlot. Cattle that are yard weaned are more familiar with stock yards, water troughs, feeding and people. Yard weaned cattle have higher weight gains and are less susceptible to respiratory disease in the feedlot.




Pre-feedlot vaccination – vaccinating for clostridial and respiratory diseases, at least one month prior to feedlot entry, provides protection for the animals when they arrive at the feedlot. Vaccination on-farm is more effective, as it occurs prior to the animal's immune system being challenged by mixing with other cattle and introduction to a new environment. Talk to your agent or feedlot buyer regarding premiums that may be available for pre-vaccinated cattle.

Administration – ensure the LPA NVD is completed correctly and the cattle are consigned from the correct Property Identification Code (PIC) on the National Livestock Identification System (NLIS) database.

Finally, communicating information along the cattle supply chain can improve performance right along the chain. Discuss feedlot requirements with your agent or feedlot buyer and seek feedback on the performance of your animals.

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