Keeping Show Cattle Healthy

Nothing is worse for an exhibitor than having that good steer or heifer that you’ve spent hours and hours with and it gets a cold, pneumonia, or a respiratory disease and causes you to miss a major show. Severe respiratory infections can leave calves listless, coughing with loss of appetite that can lead to death if action isn’t taken.

What can be done to prevent this? The first thing that gives young calves protection is a well planned vaccination program. Veterinarians will also tell you that two vaccinations, 4-6 weeks a part, is much better than a single vaccination. Maximum immunity is achieved only with two treatments.

Hopefully calves were vaccinated before they left the farm but if they were not, they should be vaccinated for:

- 7 way Clostridium
- Haemophilus Somnus
- 5 way Lepto
- 4 way Respiratory
- Pastuerella (p. haemolytica and p. multocida)

In 4-6 weeks revaccinate for maximum immunity. Consult with your local veterinarian about details concerning a vaccination program. In addition to a good vaccination program listed below are some helpful ideas that can also keep your calves healthy.

1. Provide plenty of shade or keep your calf under a fan during the hot summer months.
2. A good exercise area is essential that also has fresh, clean water available.
3. Use fresh feed only and avoid moldy hay. Feed hay daily.

If you change feed, do it gradually. The calf’s droppings are an excellent indicator of their well being. They should never be hard, but should be thick enough to “pile up”, look oily, and have an odor recognized by good cattle feeders. Beware of scours and loose or sour smelling droppings. Over feeding, drastically changing the ration, excess protein, or irregularity of feeding are some causes of scours.

4. Treat for internal and external parasites as needed.
5. Use a quart spray bottle with fly chemical and use as needed for fly control.
6. At a show, always tie cattle out at night (a natural setting) and never use the “community water trough.” Use your own feed and water buckets.
7. Always haul cattle in the coolest part of the day in a ventilated, uncrowded trailer.
8. When you return from a show, observe the calf closely for several days for signs of sickness.

In summary, twice vaccinated, well-managed, healthy show cattle will provide many happy moments for the junior livestock exhibitor.

Billy Moss
Area Livestock Teacher
North Region Agricultural Education