



The North Dakota PRECONDITIONING PROGRAM

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• INTRODUCTION

The North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association (BCIA) is continuing its leadership in supporting a CERTIFIED PRECONDITIONING PROGRAM for North Dakota calves. This program is also supported by the North Dakota Cattle Feeders Association, the North Dakota Cooperative Extension Service, the North Dakota Feed Manufacturers Association, the North Dakota Livestock Markets, the North Dakota Stockmen's Association and the North Dakota Veterinary Medical Association.

Each year approximately ¾ million feeder calves are sold in North Dakota. These sales represent about 15-20% of the total agricultural income in the state. The BCIA certified preconditioning program is intended to protect this income and to attain the highest standards of quality and performance once North Dakota feeder calves reach the feedlot.

• WHAT IS PRECONDITIONING?

Preconditioning is "the preparation of a calf, which has been nursing its mother, to better withstand the stress of movement from its production site into the channels of markets and ultimately to the feedlot."

Preconditioning is a complete health management program. "Pre" means before some event. "Condition" means to process, to prepare. Preconditioning feeder calves means "to prepare them so they can best withstand the stress and adjustment they undergo when they leave their point of origin in route to the feedlot."

In simple terms, preconditioning is a management tool — it is an insurance program — which involves

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the use of best known practices to produce and market healthy feeder calves. Basically, preconditioning is common sense and sound husbandry.

Preconditioning requires: adequate castrating, dehorning and weaning practices; water trough and feed bunk adjustment at the production site; proper immunization; control of parasites; accurate identification of preconditioned calves; and written certification by seller and his veterinarian.

• PRECONDITIONING REQUIREMENTS

1. CASTRATING, DEHORNING, AND WEANING PRACTICES:

- A preconditioned calf was dehorned and castrated when it was still nursing its dam, preferably during the spring of the year.

- A preconditioned calf is castrated, dehorned and weaned for at least 30 days before being sold.

2. WATER TROUGH AND FEED BUNK ADJUSTMENT AT THE PRODUCTION SITE:

A preconditioned calf must have, for at least 30 days, the opportunity to accustom itself to water troughs and feed bunks. This practice will insure feedlot performance. In addition, this adjustment period of 30 days at the site of origin will result in heavier calves and less shrink. Records prove that during this period a calf will easily gain from 1½ to 2½ lbs. per day before being sold. The rancher has the option of feeding home grown rations or selecting one of the several excellent commercial preconditioning rations.

3. PROPER IMMUNIZATIONS: To prevent losses associated with shipping fever and other feedlot

ly vaccinated against several diseases.

Vaccination of calves is part of, but not a substitute for, a total herd health management program. **It is essential that an adequate cow herd vaccination program be implemented before even considering preconditioning calves.** If not, the economic benefits of preconditioning will not materialize.

Preconditioned calves **must receive** the following immunizations **at least three weeks before shipment:**

- IBR ("red nose")
- PI₃ (Parainfluenza-3)
- BVD
- "6 or 7-Way" clostridial bacterin (to protect calves against black leg, malignant edema, overeating types C and D, *Cl. novyi* and *Cl. sordelli*)

The North Dakota Preconditioning Program requires that the **MANDATORY** vaccinations be administered **NO LATER** than 21 days **BEFORE** the sale. However, participants in the program are encouraged to administer the vaccines at least two weeks before weaning to reduce stress and to insure maximum immunity at the time they wean their calves.

It must be re-emphasized that, although needed, immunizations are only one aspect of preconditioning, and only a part of complete herd health management. Their timely and adequate use cannot be divorced from proper nutrition, reduction of stress, managerial soundness, and a productive relation with the local veterinarian.

4. **CONTROL OF PARASITES:** Preconditioned calves must receive grub and lice treatment **at least three weeks before shipment.** Although desirable, worming is not mandatory.
5. **IDENTIFICATION AND CERTIFICATION:** Individual identification of each preconditioned calf and written certification of the practices involved in preconditioning are indispensable components of the program. They facilitate marketing preconditioned calves, assure maximum economic returns, enable "tracebacks," give the feedlot owner reliable information to determine if further processing is needed, and provide data to evaluate the overall performance of the program.

Preconditioned calves are identified by a green numbered metal tag placed in the left ear. The certificate is signed by the seller and his veterinarian. Tags and certificates can be obtained from practicing veterinarians.

The benefits of preconditioning fall into three categories: benefits for the calf, benefits for the seller, and benefits for the buyer.

1. **BENEFITS FOR THE CALF:** A preconditioned calf is an all around better calf than one which is not preconditioned. It is better because:

- stress is reduced to a minimum
- death and disease losses are dramatically cut down
- a preconditioned calf has been adequately immunized against costly diseases and external parasites are controlled
- preconditioned calves are **ready to move into a feedlot**

2. **BENEFITS FOR THE SELLER:** The seller of preconditioned calves realizes a return on his investment. Preconditioned calves are 40-70 lbs heavier than their non-preconditioned counterparts. This extra weight alone pays for feed, vaccines and parasite control and, under present market conditions, assures additional income.

Once a seller establishes a reputation of feedlot performance for his/her preconditioned calves, buyers will buy these calves at a premium and profits should increase.

Ultimately, preconditioning enables the cow/calf producer to maximize his production capabilities.

3. **BENEFITS FOR THE BUYER:** Morbidity and mortality in the feedlot will be greatly reduced by preconditioning. Preconditioned calves respond better to treatment. They shrink less and have no problem with adaptation of feedbunks. Preconditioning results in minimum processing once calves reach the feedlot. Feed efficiency and weight gains are improved.

• FURTHER INFORMATION

Additional details and information on how to participate in this program are available from:

- Your local veterinarian
- Your county agent
- The ND-BCIA Secretary, Dr. Kris Ringwall, Hettinger Experiment Station, Box 507, Hettinger, ND 58639, phone: (701) 567-2877.
- The ND Extension Veterinarian, Dr. Kurt Wohlgemuth, Van Es Hall, NDSU, Fargo, ND 58105, phone: (701) 237-7522.