

## Beef Briefs

by  
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### PLANNING THE FALL HEALTH PROGRAM

The recent bovine viral diarrhea (BVD) outbreak in Pennsylvania has again emphasized the need to plan an effective fall health program for the beef cow-calf herd.

Recent reports in some of the beef journals have encouraged the use of prevaccination and preconditioning of beef calves as an effective tool to prevent disease in feedlot and backgrounded cattle. How do you do this and what is it worth?

The purpose of preconditioning or prevaccinating calves is to help alleviate the stress they experience at weaning, shipment, and adjustment to a feedlot environment while simultaneously building resistance against some of the causes of disease that result from this stress, particularly respiratory disease. Preconditioning also implies the calves are castrated, implanted, dehorned, weaned, and started on feed at least three weeks prior to sale and/or shipment. All weaned beef calves should be castrated and dehorned well before weaning — the cost is too little compared to the discount on the sale price when these jobs are not done. That leaves vaccination and weaning to meet preconditioning guidelines.

The cash cost of a complete preconditioning program will be about \$30-\$40 per calf. This includes a high quality grain feed to be fed for 3-4 weeks and two rounds of a vaccination program that would include IBR, BVD, PI3, BRSV, H. Somnus, pasteurized, and a 7-way clostridial. Other costs that may be added are implants, wormers, and treatment costs for any calves that get sick before you sell them. The non-cash costs would include interest, labor, and death loss you may incur.

There are only a couple of ways to recapture these costs: receiving a higher price per pound for the calves, selling heavier calves, or both.

Preconditioning has been around for many years, but one of the reasons that it has failed in the past is because the calf owner was not compensated for the additional costs.

To make preconditioning and prevaccination programs work for you, there must be some market planning involved. Two instances that would usually make this program feasible would be if you retain ownership of the calves and feed them out yourself (particularly at another location), or if you are selling calves directly off the farm to a feedlot operator. In the latter case, the feedlot owner may provide the drugs and feed.

There are special electronic sales in West Virginia and Virginia that capitalize on these programs. Most of the buyers recognize the value of preconditioned calves to their feeding enterprise and pay more for them. If you use these markets, find out if there is a special prevaccination of preconditioned sale that would work for you. If you plan to market your calves at local auctions, you prob-

ably should not consider prevaccination or preweaning because you probably will not get paid for your trouble.

At most of these sales, calves are bought in smaller groups and then combined into larger groups for shipment and feeding. As a result, some are treated and some are not, and the feedlot operator can't tell the difference.

### A Telltale Sign

I recently had the opportunity to participate in a program in Lancaster County in which some steers were viewed live by the audience, and then everyone was invited back a couple of nights later to view the carcasses.

These programs are always a very enlightening experience for those who know little about evaluating carcass traits in a live animal, and they usually serve as an humbling experience for those who think they do.

One particular steer continues to stand out in my mind from that program. He was a big one — he weighed 1,655 pounds. There were a lot of "oohs" and "ahhs" when he walked in — he was well-finished, high grading, high dressing. Just the kind to top the market and make the feeder a lot of money — or so it seemed.

The steer did dress well — 63.4 percent — and a cattle buyer indicated he would be worth about \$3/cwt more than the average steer. Then the roof caved in. He had a yield grade of 5.2, a carcass weight just over 1,000 pounds, and had 1.1 inches of fat over his rib. He graded Choice, but just barely.

The carcass weight and yield grade dock on the steer was about \$15/cwt. The additional cost of putting that extra fat and weight on the steer was about \$4/cwt for the last 400 pounds. With a reasonable amount of feed cost to put that last 400 pounds on him, the total expected cost to feed that steer to the heavier weight would be about \$280. When we add the \$150 dock he took for being too big and fat, the total goes to \$430. If we had sold the steer at 1,265 pounds for \$60/cwt and compared that to the \$3 "premium" we got for putting on another 400 pounds, the difference in value was about \$290. Our so-called "market topping" steer lost about \$140.

Who lost that \$140? I think we all know it wasn't the feed company or the packer. The truth is this kind of steer is everything that is wrong with some of the cattle in our industry.

We have had some down markets in the industry lately, and inefficient feeding, big carcasses, fat, and poor business management are contributing factors.

The industry is swiftly moving toward a value-based system of pricing fed cattle. The feeder who sends these kind to town will find he will no longer be able to afford to stay in business.

# Ratite Association Holds First Seminar

**HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.)** — On June 12, the Northeast Ratite Association held its first seminar at the Days Inn.

The speakers at the seminar were Pat Hoctor, editor of the Animal Finder's Guide; Donald Jones, Sherry Stanley from Trans-Global Ostrich Products, LTD.; Dr. Jagne, New Bolton Center; Gregg Smith, Southern Cross Emus; and Cindy Shaw, Morning Star Ranch.

Hoctor spoke on the Rhea management and the USDA. Hoctor also discussed the formula, for ratite feed, which was developed by Dr. Duane Ullrey for the San Diego Zoo.

Donald Jones, spoke on his adventures in Ostrich farming. He stated that he traveled to South

Africa to find out what it was all about. While there, he traveled to several Ostrich farms to see how they handled the Ostriches.

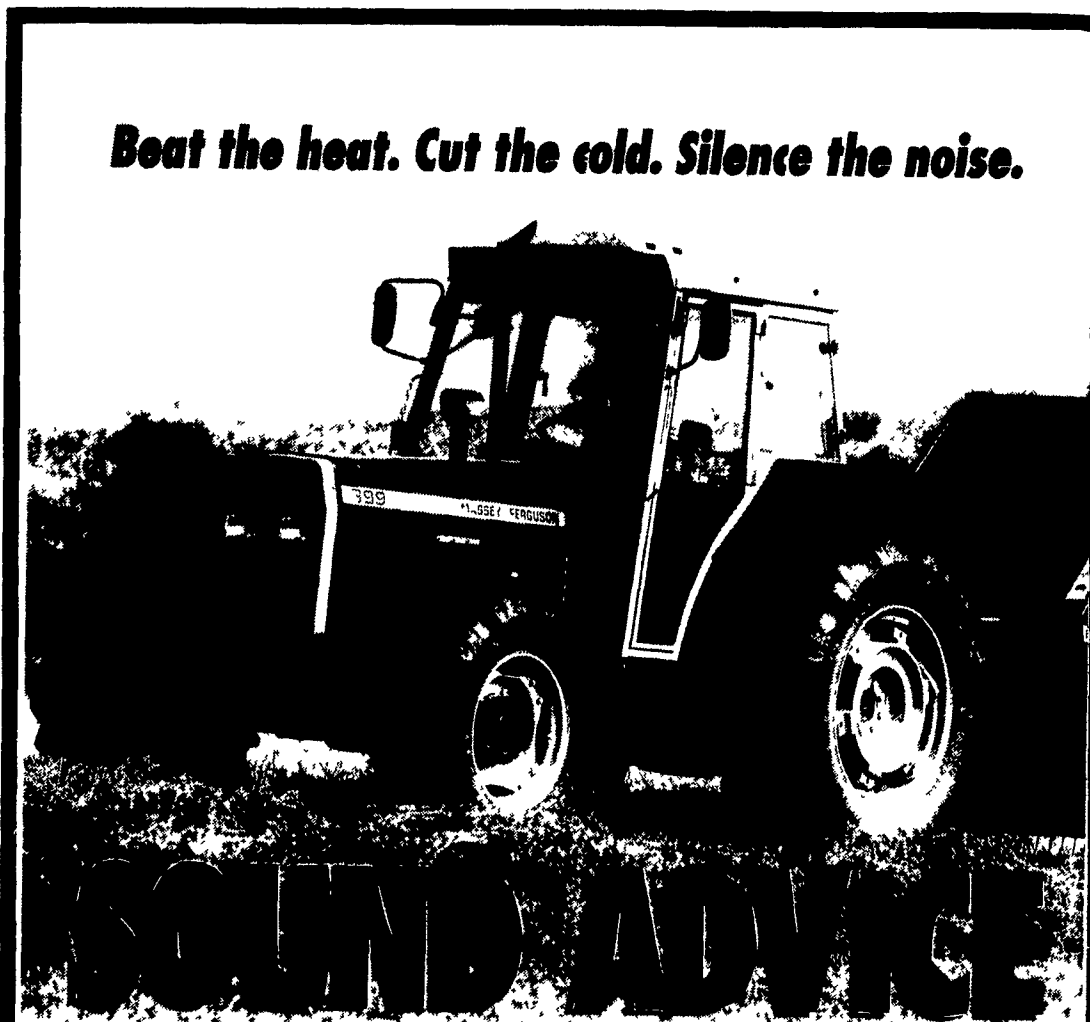
Sherry Stanley spoke on Ostrich Natural Plus feeds which was developed by Mark Rosenfeld, PH.D. She then explained the purpose of the ingredients and how it effected egg production, fertility, embryo development, and growth of the ratites.

Dr. Jagne discussed some of the more common problems of ratites and also explained both causes and cures for ratite disease. Dr. Jagne also explained the services offered by the New Bolton Center. One such service was the testing of eggs for disease and complete necropsies, which cost only \$20 for any number of birds submitted

at one time.

Greg Smith spoke on Emu farming in Australia. Smith discussed farming techniques and also Emus in the wild. He noted that all Emus in Australia were descendant from five pairs taken out of the wild in 1970. He also noted that the best age to slaughter Emu was 14 months, but at 16 months you would get more oil from the bird.

Cindy Shaw spoke about the research behind Emu and Rhea products. She noted that Rhea oil was being used in baby formula and Emu oil was being used in burn creams. Also noted was the fact that Emu and Rhea meat held up well when frozen, being invaluable for the growing frozen food industry.



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