

Keeping Feeder Cattle Healthy

In recent years, the approach to animal health has switched from treatment of disease to prevention of disease. Cattle producers who realize that preventive care saves time and money in the long run are concerned about how management practices and environmental conditions affect animal health.

One practice that produces stress in feeder cattle is removing them from the familiar maternal environment to the competitive feedlot. Because this transition is unavoidable under most feeding systems, producers must devote considerable effort to preparing animals for the change.

Other stressful environmental conditions and procedures included the following:

- dehorning
- castration
- weaning
- sudden change in feed or water intake
- loss of familiar surroundings
- poor sanitation
- exposure to new disease-producing agents
- transportation
- exposure to bad weather

Most animals can withstand one or more of these stresses simultaneously and remain healthy because they have a variety of self-regulating controls that keep their body system functioning normally.

One such control, the immune system, protects the animals against potential disease-producing agents during pe-

riods of stress. Numerous stresses acting at one time may overwhelm the immune system, resulting in disease outbreaks such as "shipping fever" in Pennsylvania feedlots.

Nutritional Influence On Health

Authorities generally agree that as much as 75 to 80 percent of the health problems in feeder cattle are related to shipping. Once the cattle have adjusted to their new environment, health maintenance should require less attention. But some conditions, such as intensive grain feeding alone, produce constant stress on cattle and can cause health problems at any time.

Proper feeding requires knowledge of the nutritive value of feed materials, the nutritional needs of cattle, and the unique characteristics of ruminant digestion. For information on nutritive value and nutritional needs, contact your county Cooperative Extension office.

Like all ruminants, cattle depend on microorganisms in the rumen for digestion of forage and grain. These microorganisms adapt to new feeding programs very slowly. When sudden changes are made in the diet, improper digestion results, reducing essential nutrients and producing abnormal rumen fermentation.

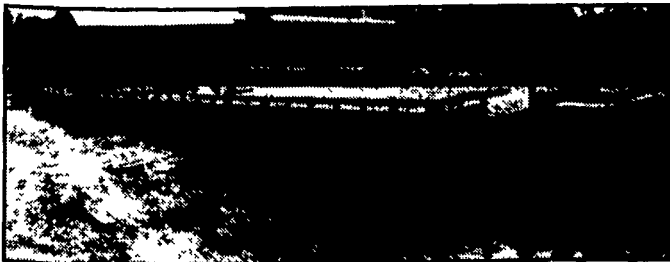
Significant dietary changes should be made over a period of one to three weeks, not within a few days. Before you transport cattle, you should gradually adapt them to a feeding program similar to the one they will receive after sale and shipment.

Adaptation is not practical if animals are sold through an

(Turn to Page 70)

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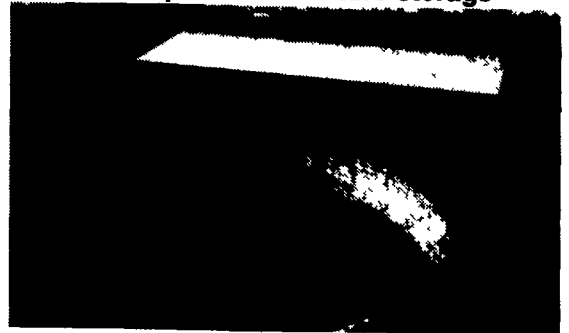
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