

# Health Management of Sick, Newly-Arrived Beef Cattle

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## Introduction

A successful program for the management of sick cattle must be simple and systematic; that is, a sick animal must be easily identified and the treatment must be routine and require a minimum of judgement decisions by the working crew.

The key elements in this program include:

- A. Identifying sick cattle as soon as possible.
- B. Keeping adequate records.
- C. Systematic treatment of sick animals.
- D. Evaluating sick cattle daily, and
- E. Changing treatment, if necessary, until an improvement is noted.

A stocker operator wanting to use this program should consult a veterinarian prior to implementing these procedures.

## Identifying Sick Cattle As Soon As Possible

### For the Experienced Stocker Operator:

Usually the experienced stocker operator (backgrounder) can readily identify sick animals by visual inspection. We will not question this person's ability *nor* will we try to "fix it if it's not broke." If you feel confident with your ability to identify sick animals, please skip this section and go to **Records**.

### For the Inexperienced Stocker Operator:

The following technique is offered to the inexperienced stocker handler or anyone who does not have the "*knack*" for identifying sick cattle:

On the morning following arrival, routine processing of the cattle begins. At this time it is desirable to pull as many of the *sick* animals as possible. Elevated body temperatures and/or visible signs of illness are used to identify the sick animals. As soon as the animal is restrained in the chute **TAKE ITS TEMPERATURE** using a rectal thermometer.

The processing crew follows two rules for pulling sick cattle:

1. Designate as **SICK** all cattle with a rectal temperature of 104°F or greater.
2. Designate as **SICK** all visibly ill cattle **REGARDLESS** of the body temperature.

Visible symptoms of illness include excessive nasal discharges, labored breathing, harsh deep coughing, moderate to severe depression or bloody diarrhea. Animals exhibiting only loose stools or non-bloody diarrhea are not pulled as sick.

Animals designated as sick should be identified with numbered backtags glued to the forehead or numbered ear tags. In addition, they should be vaccinated, wormed and injected with vitamins as well as the non-ill animals. Castration and dehorning can be delayed if necessary. These procedures require additional time and it is important that the processing and treatment of the sick cattle be completed well before noon. In addition, castration and dehorning are very stressful to sick cattle.

*NOTE: The value of 104°F was obtained from experience and data accumulation. Occasionally, younger animals (recently weaned) will exhibit higher body temperatures. If you notice that you are pulling a great number of animals that appear to be healthy and that are also on feed, then change the pulling temperature to 105°F. Be Flexible, don't "get in a rut" and stay there when you know things don't fit.*

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