

Beef Health Care

Maintaining the health of your animals will be a major concern once you decide to have a small herd. The first two pieces of advice in this area are:

1. Get in touch with a local veterinarian and work out a way to get his advice and assistance when you need it.
2. Obtain a copy of the Beef Cow-Calf Health Handbook if you are starting a cow-calf operation.

You need to know a veterinarian because he knows the local situation and can be more specific in what he recommends. You also need to be acquainted so he will know who you are if an emergency arises. Some general health care advice follows.

Diseases are a fact of life in beef cattle as they are in humans. Prevention of diseases is the best way to handle this problem because cures are expensive. Vaccination against disease is important but it is difficult to make blanket recommendations as each cattleman's situation varies. All female calves should be vaccinated against brucellosis between four and twelve months of age and all calves should be vaccinated against blackleg and malignant edema after four to six months of age. Optional vaccinations for calves include IBR, BVD, PI₃, redwater disease and calf scours but your veterinarian should help you decide whether these vaccinations are needed.

Two vaccinations are recommended for breeding animals: vibriosis and leptospirosis, given about 30 to 60 days before breeding. Several other vaccinations may be desirable in your area so seek the guidance of your local veterinarian.

Keep a close watch on your cattle and investigate if any of them show abnormal behavior. This is not a situation where you can expect the cows to take care of themselves. Get up close to your stock every couple of days and see that they are healthy. Your cattle

should be alert and in good condition: not with bones all showing and not very fat. They should have clear eyes and a good hair coat. They should not be fighting flies constantly, should not have running eyes or a running nose or bloody urine or bloody feces. If you see something that doesn't look right, find out what it is quickly.

Internal Parasites or worms are an especially bad problem in Florida because of the warm climate and plentiful rainfall. These conditions favor the growth of parasites which may infest grazing cattle. The parasites live in the digestive tract of the cow and rob her of nutrients she needs for good health and growth for herself and her calf.

The following recommendations should help reduce problems with internal parasites:

1. Provide adequate pasture and good nutrition.
2. Do not overstock or overgraze pastures or lots.
3. Rotate cattle between pastures.
4. Raise feed bunks and water troughs off the ground to keep them clean.
5. Drag something over confined pasture areas to break up manure before putting cattle into that area.
6. Have fecal samples checked occasionally by your veterinarian to see how bad parasites are in your cattle.
7. Deworm cattle at regular intervals as needed.

The last recommendation needs some guidelines. In general, beef cows should be dewormed before the breeding season and again about weaning time. Calves should be dewormed when they start grazing and may need treatment again three to four weeks later. Steers you buy to feed should be dewormed if they were not treated before you bought them. Consult your veterinarian about a deworming program and have him do it for you until you learn how.

