

Benefits of Low-stress Livestock Handling: Examples

Herd Health:

In a feedlot in Alberta, 3500 cattle were vaccinated and 3500 were not. There were no differences in rates of illness between the groups. Thus, vaccinating was unnecessary because of the way the animals were handled.

In a feedlot in Southern Idaho, riders changed the way calves were managed: 1) after weaning, 2) as they entered the feedlot, and 3) when put on feed and water. Rates of illness declined from 10% to less than 1%. According to the feedlot vet, it costs about \$100/head if a calf gets sick just once.

A number of large animal vets who have worked with Bud Williams, read Steve Cotes book, etc., report that poor handling causes much of the feedlot illness, especially respiratory illness. Furthermore, treatment is often unsuccessful because animals are under so much stress.

Extend the Grazing Season and Reduce Hay Fed:

Ranchers on several allotments in Central Idaho hired trained riders to reduce time cattle spent in riparian areas and increase time spent on uplands. Riparian area conditions improved as well as utilization of typically underused upland areas. Cattle were able to stay on allotments 10 to 13 days longer because of improved distribution and grazing was more even. In most cases, cattle coming off the allotments would be fed hay. For two associations with about 20 permittees, 2600 head would be fed on hay for an extra 10 -13 days. At a cost of \$100/ton for hay, it's a savings of \$32,000. Using riders required more meetings between ranchers and agencies, but the savings (gain in days on the range) could be realized every season and may even increase over time.

Predation

One rancher in Arizona has lost no cattle to red wolves since improving his handling techniques. He began keeping his cattle together and moving them regularly. Prior to his change in livestock handling, he lost an average of 13 calves per year. His neighbors are still losing stock to wolves at the former rate. Reindeer owners in Northern Alberta report similar successes with handling except they lost many, many head each year to wolves.

Labor

It's very common for riders to go from needing 7 horses and 5-6 dogs to manage a large herd to needing only 2 horses and 2-3 dogs when they use low-stress livestock handling.

Weight Gain

Two ranchers bought 100 yearlings at a sale. They sorted the yearlings randomly, 25 to one ranch and 75 to the other. One group of yearlings were put on rangeland and moved to a new location every few days. The other group grazed improved, irrigated pasture and moved every few days using electric fence. When animals were weighed, the cattle on rangeland gained an average of 3/4 lb/day more than those on irrigated pasture. There was no illness observed in cattle on range while the other group had a little pink eye.