

DAIRY VETERINARY NEWSLETTER

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Proper and Accepted Means of Calf Euthanasia

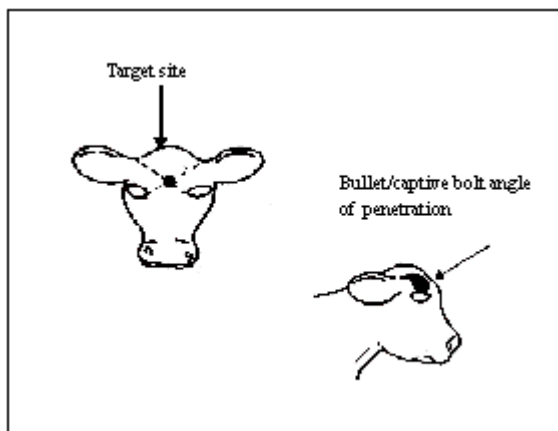
Another farm employee undercover video, of calves being beaten to death at a Texas calf ranch, has increased scrutiny regarding acceptable euthanasia methods on farms, including calf euthanasia. An April 25, 2011 article posted on Dairy Herd Network by Tom Quaife addresses this. The article can be seen at:

<http://www.dairyherd.com/dairy-news/latest/Proper-euthanasia-discussed-following-Texas-calf-ranch-debacle--120501009.html>

One question in the article is one that I have discussed with other veterinarians in the past, with some having different opinions than others – is it better to use a captive bolt gun or a rifle for bovine euthanasia?

A *penetrating* captive bolt gun is recommended by The National Dairy FARM Program Animal Care Manual. Dr. Jan Shearer of Iowa State University and a leading authority on humane euthanasia in cattle, says calf euthanasia may utilize an anesthetic overdose, gunshot or captive bolt. Especially older calves and adult cattle require the use of a penetrating as opposed to non-penetrating captive bolt for humane euthanasia, Shearer says. He also added that with any method other than anesthetic overdose, a secondary kill method such as exsanguination may be needed. I have found in the past that if there is complete stunning of an animal to be euthanized, exsanguination can be rapidly achieved by cutting into the axilla.

The target for the bullet or captive bolt for calf euthanasia is shown below. For calves six months of age and younger, direct the shot at the intersection of lines drawn from the top base of each ear to the inside corner of the eye on the opposite side of the head (Ontario OMAFRA).



Proposed Reduction in SCC Legal Limit Rejected at NCIMS - Still 750,000/ml

The National Conference on Interstate Milk Shipments (NCIMS), which meets every odd-numbered year in May to consider regulations on most of the milk shipped in the US, just met again last week. One measure considered, as it has been for 12 years, was the proposed reduction in the legal limit of Somatic Cell Count (SCC) for shipment of milk in the U.S. (unless the milk buying company ships no milk across state lines, which is uncommon) from 750,000/ml to 400,000/ml, phased in until 2014. The measure was defeated, 26-25, meaning that the SCC limit will remain at 750,000/ml. (Except for some states including Idaho that have enacted their own lower SCC limits.)

As in the past when this measure has failed, one result is that some people in the dairy industry have stated that this is a disappointment, etc. What is probably the most accurate statement I have seen regarding the vote was made by Jamie Jonker, National Milk Producers Federation vice president of Scientific and Regulatory Affairs: “- we’re confident that the trend towards lower Somatic Cell Counts will continue, regardless of the vote today.” This will probably renew speculation about when or if the proposed SCC regulations for milk shipped to plants with a European Union export certificate (the majority of U.S. plants have such a certificate) will take place and exactly what new standards and enforcement for individual source dairy farms will look like. That program has essentially been on hold for 7 years.

Cattle Rustling may be Increasing in the West

For many of us, cattle rustling may primarily be a subject that makes one think of the “Old West”, including that popularized in books, movies, and TV shows. My first experience with cattle rustling was during my first year out of veterinary school. A client dairy farm that kept cows in both Indiana and Ohio used to have us hot brand all of their Holsteins when they weighed several hundred pounds. The reason was that in addition to steel ear tags, they hoped to discourage rustling or any other ownership disputes.

A few years later an Ohio dairy client lost dozens of Holstein heifers from a remote pasture over a period of several months and never noticed. However, one sale barn called them and said they had discovered that a number of cattle auction facilities in the area were also receiving heifers with brucellosis vaccination ear tags identifying them as the owner. The cattle were being sold by one other person that the various sale barns’ employees had never seen or heard of until the previous few months. The rustler was caught, convicted and a financial judgment was made against them. However, recovery of the money was going to be a slow process, and the producer said he would have rather had the heifers raised on his own farm than the money anyway. He commented that they would have noticed the decreased numbers eventually, but over the few months they had not.

Now, cattle rustling, including of dairy cattle, appears to be increasing in Utah and Idaho. Speculation as to the driving forces has included the poor economy, the high value of cattle in 2011, methamphetamine addiction, and other ties to the drug trade. In some cases the rustlers are trusted farm or ranch employees who have access to records and inventories. According to an article by Kathleen McKeivitt in Progressive Dairyman in May 2011, a four-county area of western Idaho lost more than 2000 dairy and range cattle to rustling in 2010, and the pace of rustling losses has increased so far in 2011.

At a meeting of brand inspectors, law enforcement officers, and producers in Ola, Idaho, it was reported that most cattle are taken between 11 p.m. and 3 a.m. Idaho State Brand Inspection Chief Larry Hayhurst said, “The perpetrators are - - coming from poor economic conditions or are part of drug cartels or both. Watch out for trailers that shouldn’t be near your property.” Various accounts often describe losses of between \$2000 and \$15,000 from a “quick” rustling theft, including in Utah. In a related article by Jake Putnam in the Idaho Farm Bureau News, it was reported that the Idaho State Police receive 300 to 500 reports of lost or missing cattle each year. The losses are not limited to range cattle, and include feedlot and dairy animals also.

What can be done?

Hayhurst says that one of the most effective measures is windshield stickers, especially at back country trail heads or on farm property. The stickers are distributed to farmers, ranchers or other interested people in Idaho. The time and license plate number of vehicles (especially vans or trailers) parked in any suspicious area is recorded. A sticker is placed on the windshield of the vehicle and the corresponding information is sent into the brand inspectors. "It lets them know they've been observed", which apparently has some deterrent value. In addition, the information sent in can be used. "If we have missing cattle from an area, we have license plate numbers and the day they were in the area. It's too early to tell how it's working but it's a first step to get a handle on some of this crime," said Hayhurst. Some areas of Idaho also set up random road blocks to check all vehicles hauling animals and find out who is carrying what animals and where they came from.

What can dairy veterinarians do?

Discuss this with your clients. In addition to being vigilant and keeping track of cattle numbers, including young animals away from the milking facility, two other rustling countermeasures are recommended, because of heightened awareness by cattle buyers and auction facilities:

Hot brand or freeze brand cattle.

Implant RFID chips into all cattle. The last previous recorded ownership can be retrieved rapidly with a hand-held scanner when cattle are presented for sale. Many producers are skeptical of government bureaucracy or other tracking of ID's. However, discrepancies can be resolved, and this will prevent thieves from being able to sell stolen cattle at sale barns. (Some reader comments on this story mention that many custom slaughter facilities or meat market businesses will not check for any type of ID. The vigilance for strange vehicles or suspicious activity may be the primary way to stop rustling. There are also many comments indicating how much distrust of any government ID program is still present.)

I hope to hear from our readers regarding any experiences with rustling and countermeasures used.

Wolves Removed from Endangered Species List in Utah and 5 Other States

This is an update on a previous story in our March 2011 newsletter that generated several comments. In 6 western states including Utah live an estimated 1,651 wolves, a population expanding rapidly over the last 10 years. In a surprise announcement, the Department of the Interior stated that gray wolves in 5 of those states, Idaho and Montana and parts of Oregon, Washington and Utah, will be removed from the Endangered Species List. Discussions over the last several years on removal of wolves from the endangered list did not include the possibility of removal in most of the 6 states, including Utah.

The decision was driven by increased concern over wolf predation of livestock, in addition to wolf-human interactions. Details of what this means as far as hunting or other management plans for the wolf population are not clear yet, but the state of Utah will be involved in the wolf management plans. This may consist only of gathering data for at least another 5 years.

5600 Old Main Hill
Logan UT 84322-5600



AP Photo/Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks Department

Please let us know your comments and also suggestions for future topics. I can be reached at (435) 760-3731 (Cell), (435) 797-1899 M-W, (435) 797-7120 Th-F or David.Wilson@usu.edu.

Handwritten signature of David J. Wilson in blue ink.

David Wilson, DVM
Extension Veterinarian

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