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Returns from Value Added Health Programs Given to Calves

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Buyers often desire that calves be administered specific vaccination programs prior to shipping. However, there are questions by Florida cow-calf producers about the cost of these programs and recovery of these costs when calves are sold and shipped. The best study to-date that provides answers to these questions is published in a series of research reports by Dr. Michael King with the College of Veterinary Medicine at Colorado State University (King, et al., 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, CSU Beef Program Reports).

For the study, Dr. King analyzed four years of sales data (1995-1998) accumulated by Superior Livestock Video Auctions throughout the U. S. In each year, sales records involved approximately 1700 lots with an average of 122 calves per lot. The average sale weight of calves over four years was 537 pounds. The overall four-year study involved a huge amount of data with 6,800 lots and 832,000 calves that adds validity to the results.

Dr. King analyzed price differences for a number of variables including calf origin, calf sex, breed composition, frame score, fleshiness, and several calf vaccination programs. For this report, we will look at comparisons Dr. King made between three vaccination programs included in the analysis. These are: 1) calves not in any vaccination program, 2) calves not in a documented vaccination program, but according to the sales catalog they received one or more virus vaccines (IBR, BVD, PI3, and BRSV) at some time prior to the date of sale, and 3) Superior Livestock Video Auction's Vac 34 documented value added health program that requires calves to be vaccinated at 2 to 4 months of age against Clostridial 7-way and vaccinated again at 3 to 4 weeks before weaning against IBR, PI3, BVD, BRSV, and Pasteurella haemolytic bacterin.

In comparison to calves receiving no vaccinations, buyers paid \$0.65 per hundredweight more for calves that received one or more virus vaccines (undocumented) prior to the sale date. Calves receiving vaccinations would bring an additional \$3.49 per head at a sell weight of 537 pounds.

In comparison to calves receiving no vaccinations, buyers paid \$1.33 more per hundredweight for calves in the Superior Livestock Vac 34 documented value added health program. Thus, calves in a documented value added health program would bring an additional \$7.14 per head at a sell weight of 537 pounds.

This information collected by Dr. King shows that buyers will pay premiums for calves that receive one or more virus vaccinations. They will pay a higher premium for calves documented to have received Clostridial 7-way at marking and branding and penned a second time at 3 to 4 weeks before weaning and vaccinated against IBR, PI3, BVD, BRSV, and Pasteurella haemolytic bacterin.. The cost of these practices and return data presented above allow Florida cattlemen to determine the economical benefits of similar calf vaccination programs.

Unfortunately this information is most applicable to cattle operations that sell truck load lots. Future technology will enable cattlemen to identify calves from small herds that receive specific value added health programs and determine premiums paid for such calves when sold to order buyers or through livestock auction markets.