



# Bayou BEEF TIPS



## The Four Parts of a Good Herd Health Program

Prevention of diseases in beef herds is essential for being profitable. Waiting until signs of a disease appear to institute a herd health program is too late. Once most diseases are finally apparent, they have been smoldering in a herd for months and have been reducing herd profits. Unfortunately, many of these diseases also have no treatment, so prevention is critical.

Many cattle producers equate a herd health program with a vaccination and/or deworming program. But good overall herd health takes much more than this. There are four basic parts to herd health programs: nutrition; deworming; vaccinations; and biosecurity. All of these play a role in keeping cattle healthy and preventing diseases.

### Nutrition

The first and most important part of a good herd health program is good nutrition. If adequate nutrition is not provided, deworming, vaccinating and biosecurity practices will fail to make a big impact. If nutrition is optimized, health and production will be also. Adequate protein, energy, vitamins, minerals and clean water are essential. If these nutrients are not provided in proper amounts, diseases and production losses will be a problem. Poor nutrition depresses immunity to diseases and interferes with response to vaccination. Poor nutrition can be an underlying cause of diseases such as pneumonia, foot rot and infertility. Much time and effort can be spent diagnosing, vaccinating for and trying to eliminate a disease, but if nutritional problems aren't addressed, other diseases will move into a herd.

### Deworming

The mild, wet climate of Louisiana is extremely conducive to the survival of cattle parasites. Parasite infestations, whether stomach worms or liver flukes, cause significant losses in beef herds. They depress weight gains of growing cattle and cause infertility and poor milk production in cows. They also mimic poor nutrition, as they rob animals of protein and other nutrients. So, like poor nutrition, parasites lower immunity to disease and decrease vaccine responses. A good parasite-control program is an essential part of a successful herd health program.

### Vaccinations

Good nutrition and deworming boost immunity to all diseases. But some diseases can overwhelm that immunity and can cause losses even in well-fed and dewormed herds. Vaccination programs boost immunity to specific diseases, providing extra protection against common diseases.

### Biosecurity

A sound biosecurity plan will help prevent the introduction and spread of diseases in a herd. Preventing foreign animal diseases from entering cattle herds is important, but many diseases already here in the United States are costing the beef industry billions of dollars. Producers need to also keep these diseases out of their herds or keep them from spreading if they already have them. Unfortunately, even well-fed, dewormed and properly vaccinated herds still have a risk of introducing

diseases and suffering losses. Although those losses are usually much less in herds with good management and good overall immunity, a good biosecurity plan is still needed to help prevent diseases from entering a herd and causing subclinical production losses.

## **Summary**

All four parts of a herd health program are important. Many economical ways are available to improve each of these areas, so all should

be evaluated and then priorities set to address deficiencies. Also, it is much easier to control diseases and develop a good herd health program in herds with a controlled, defined breeding season. There is much more flexibility in what products can be used and when they can be used, for instance, in herds with a 90-day breeding/calving season versus those herds that have bulls out all year long. Working towards a defined 60-to-90-day calving season should be a top priority when looking at improving overall management and herd health.

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**Author:**

Christine B. Navarre, DVM, MS, DACVIM  
Extension Veterinarian, LSU AgCenter  
Department of Veterinary Science

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