

Nutritional Suggestions For Handling Purchased Stocker Cattle

Producers who purchase young cattle for backgrounding through the winter should know that purchased cattle can be more prone to health problems if not properly handled than cattle calved and weaned on the farm. Purchased stocker cattle often present more health and nutritional problems due to the stresses of handling, comingling, dehydration, starvation, and changes in environment and diet. Cattle purchased from different sources and brought into unfamiliar surroundings need careful attention to avoid sickness.

A transition period is needed between the time calves are purchased and when they are put out on winter pasture. During the transition period, calves should be kept in relatively small pastures or lots for easy observation, allowing at least 200 square feet per animal. Restraining the cattle in this manner will allow them to settle down and start eating a mixed ration sooner. Make sure the lots have ample shade and are constructed near working facilities so that sick calves can be easily pulled and treated. The lots and feed troughs should be clean and the watering troughs filled with fresh clean water.

The receiving diet should be based on farm available feeds or the calves should be supplied with a good commercial receiving diet. It is usually necessary to use only a few feed ingredients to balance an excellent starter ration.

In prepared feeds, keep all grains coarse and avoid finely ground feeds. Avoid any feed ingredient that gives poor feeding or handling properties to the diet. A number of commercial starter feeds are available and have proven effective in reducing stress and increasing weight gains.

Steps For Getting Purchased Calves On Feed

1. Calves which have been creep fed are easier to get on feed after weaning because they already know how to eat from a bunk.

2. Get calves to eat a limited amount of feed as quickly and safely as possible.

3. It is best to allow cattle to rest overnight after arrival. Provide plenty of fresh water and hay prior to processing. Early the next morning, vaccinate, treat for cattle grubs, deworm, and perform any other scheduled work on the cattle. Keep stress at a minimum. Follow your veterinarian's advice for the vaccinations to use on your herd.

4. If possible, have circular holding pens. Calves which have been weaned recently will walk the fence. Placing feed bunks and water troughs perpendicular to the fence entices the cattle to eat because they are forced to walk around the water troughs and feed bunks.

5. Place high-quality long-stemmed grass or legume hay in

the feed bunks for the first 7 days after calves arrive rather than feeding free choice in hay rings. This will encourage them to eat out of bunks. Hay should contain at least 10 percent crude protein and 53 percent TDN (total digestible nutrients).

6. Provide Bovatec in the feed ration to supply the manufacturer's recommended amount per head per day. Bovatec will help control feedlot bloat.

7. Vitamins are inexpensive. Formulate mixed feed to supply vitamins A, D, and E at 1000, 125 and 20 International Units (IU's) per pound of feed.

8. Formulate feed to contain at least 20 percent crude fiber, 12 percent crude protein, and 62 to 65 percent TDN. The fiber can be provided by hay, soybean hulls, or cottonseed hulls. Peanut hull pellets are not a good source of fiber for young cattle. The protein source should be an all natural protein such as cottonseed meal, whole cottonseed, or soybean meal and should not contain non-protein nitrogen such as urea.

9. Calcium, phosphorus, salt, and trace minerals can be provided free choice in a covered mineral feeder or mixed into the ration. Commercial minerals can be purchased which contain 5 to 8 percent phosphorus. These minerals should be mixed with trace mineral salt 80:20 (20% salt) and should be fed free choice. A complete mineral, salt mixture will contain about 1 to 2 percent phosphorus. A good homemade

mineral mix has 50 percent dicalcium phosphate and 50 percent trace mineral salt. If minerals are fed in the mixed ration, it should contain a minimum of 0.45 percent calcium, 0.40 percent phosphorus, 0.35 percent trace-mineral salt, and 1.0 percent potassium.

10. Because weaned calves will be consuming hay initially, sprinkle mixed feed over the top of the hay in the bunks. This will entice calves to consume some mixed feed in order to get to the hay. Start feeding calves the mixed ration about 2 days after their initial arrival at the rate of 2 pounds per animal. Increase the mixed feed by $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ pounds per day. Calves should be consuming about $1\frac{1}{2}$ pounds of feed per 100 pounds of body weight in 10 to 12 days.

Keep only fresh feed in front of the calves. Do not feed them more than they will clean up. Continue to increase the feed. Reduce the amount of hay as the mixed feed is increased. Round bales of hay should not be placed in the center of the weaning pen.

It is recommended that cattle remain in conditioning pens until the danger of sickness has passed, usually about 3 weeks. Examples of rations are in Table 1.

11. If feeding a commercial starter feed, follow the manufacturer's recommendations for amount and procedures.

Table 1. Example of Suggested Rations for Stocker Cattle

Ingredients	Ration Number			
	1	2	3	4
	-----Pounds-----			
Cracked corn	392	396	461	443
Cottonseed meal 41%	135	130	110	195
Molasses	100	100	100	100
Cottonseed hulls	350	300	---	---
Coastal hay	---	---	50	120
Peanut hulls	---	50	250	217
Ground limestone	10	10	6	3
Dicalcium phosphate	3	3	5	4
Trace-mineral salt ¹	5	5	5	5
Dynamate ²	3	6	8	6
Dyna-K ³	2	---	5	7
Vitamin A ⁴	---	---	---	---
Antibiotic ⁵	---	---	---	---
Bovatec ⁶	---	---	---	---
Total	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
	Calculated Analysis (Dry Basis)			
Crude protein, %	12.05	12.04	12.53	12.08
TDN, %	66.28	65.40	65.10	65.04
Crude Fiber, %	20.46	20.30	20.18	20.01
Calcium, %	0.83	0.86	0.84	0.68
Phosphorus, %	0.65	0.61	0.43	0.40
Potassium, %	1.21	1.10	1.02	1.05

¹Trace-mineral salt should supply: 1 mg. iodine, 1 mg. cobalt, 15 mg. copper, and 100 mg. zinc per head daily.

²Dynamate is 11% magnesium, 18% potassium, and 22% sulfur.

³Dyna-K is 50% potassium.

⁴Vitamin A should supply 1000 IU per pound of feed.

⁵Antibiotics can be added following FDA regulations and manufacturer's recommendations.

⁶Bovatec should be added to supply 100-360 mg. per head per day.

12. Antibiotics should be fed when needed. Follow FDA regulations and manufacturer's recommendations. A word of caution concerning antibiotics: initially, calves will not eat enough feed to get the manufacturer's recommended dose, but they may eat enough to mask sickness problems.

References

Ruffin, B.G. "Nutritional Suggestions for Preconditioning Calves." Timely Information Sheet.



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