



Tips for reducing stress when weaning calves



Stressors that can occur during weaning and receiving include:



Separation from the dam

The social stress of being removed from the mother can be significant. One management practice that gradually weans calves is fence-line weaning. This technique involves placing weaned calves and dams in adjacent pastures that allow calves to be able see their mothers while being physically separated. Make sure you have sturdy fences with no gaps to prevent calves from crawling through to the other side.



Commingling

When groups of cattle are mingled together, they can expose each other to new pathogens. Even if the animals are on the same ranch but are from different pastures, producers need to consider a commingling strategy.



Transportation

It's inevitable: At some point, cattle will need to be moved. There are many ways that producers can work to reduce stress during transportation — but similarly to humans travelling to new locations or making a big move, this major transition will likely lead to schedule changes and disruptions, changes in eating patterns, etc.



Unfamiliar diets

Going from their mothers' milk to feed might feel like a stark transition to some calves. The tips later in this article explain how to get calves to the bunk and help them transition to a new, healthy, nutrient-dense diet.

Five easy and practical management tips that will help you produce resilient cattle:

1

Vaccinate prior to shipping

Work with your veterinarian to establish a vaccination program prior to your animals being commingled and shipped. A vaccination program is essential to building a healthy immune system prior to animals being exposed to novel pathogens in a new place and when surrounded by other animals.

2

Castrate animals as early as possible

Castration is a stressful but generally necessary management practice. Research has shown that animals experience less stress when they are castrated at a younger age. Some producers will castrate at birth, when they tag or maybe when they take cattle out to grass. Whatever fits into your management schedule, getting your animals castrated early will allow them to recoup before other stressors manifest throughout the following transition stages.

3

Proper nutrition is essential

When transitioning cattle, it is important to make sure that their nutritional requirements are being met. Meeting the cattle's protein, energy and trace mineral requirements is essential for their immune function and growth. During periods of stress, it is common for animals to reduce their feed intake. In these cases, providing diets that are more nutrient-dense to compensate for reduced intake is recommended.

4

Minimize commingling

Just like with humans, anytime you bring animals from different sources together, you run the risk of exposing them to pathogens. You can reduce this risk of exposure for calves by being strategic about minimizing mixing between sources of cattle. There is also an element of social stress as the newly commingled animals work to establish a pecking order.

5

Expose calves to feed bunks and water troughs

Familiarize your animals with feed bunks and water troughs prior to shipping. This can help reduce stress during feedlot arrival, as getting calves to feed bunks prior to shipping will help them get onto feed quicker. The sooner they get on feed and start consuming water, the better they will bounce back from transportation stress.

