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**NEWS**

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## Lung adhesions: the invisible cost

When cattle get sick, it hurts performance and quality. But it's not always easy to tell those cattle from the healthy ones. Cattle with chronic pneumonia can cost producers nearly \$80 per head, without showing signs of illness.

"The loss of gain would be the biggest cost, and then loss in quality grade would come in second," says Darrell Busby, Iowa State University (ISU) Extension beef specialist. "The third loss would be in treatment cost."

ISU and Certified Angus Beef LLC (CAB) analyzed six years of health data from the university's feed-out program. Of nearly 27,000 head in the Tri-County Steer Carcass Futurity (TCSCF), 4% had lung adhesions.

"It's showing us chronic pneumonia with that lung adhering to the rib cage," Busby says. "At the packing plant, they have to literally take a knife and cut the lung away from the rib cage."

Larry Corah, CAB vice president, presented the research at recent meetings of the Midwest section of the American Society of Animal Science in Des Moines.

Since it is not routinely part of carcass data collection, many feeders may have no idea when their cattle have lung adhesions.

"We had a load of cattle in the plant and the kill floor supervisor came over and said, 'I want to show you this lot of cattle that have really bad lungs,'" Busby says. It was taking them more labor to harvest those cattle and they had increased trim loss, so Busby decided to start collecting the data to see what difference it made to producers.

As it turns out, the impact is huge.

Average daily gain (ADG) decreased from 3.3 pound (lb.) per day on the healthy cattle to 3.1 on the cattle with lung problems.

Quality also suffered. The majority graded 68.8% Choice and above, but that dropped by more than 8 points in cattle with lung adhesions. On cattle eligible for the *Certified Angus Beef*<sup>®</sup> (CAB<sup>®</sup>) brand, average acceptance rate was 20.9%, compared to only 14.9% in those with lung adhesions.

“It also increases your discount cattle, your Standards,” Corah says. “Those are huge discount cattle with \$15 to \$20 per hundredweight (cwt.) in carcass costs.”

More than 73% of cattle with lung adhesions went untreated in the feedyard.

“That can relate to two things,” he says. “Either their sickness was missed during the feedlot phase or health problems occurred prior to the feedlot.”

All cattle with lung problems lost performance and quality grade, but the treated cattle fared worse than non-treated. Percent Choice or better was 10 points lower and CAB acceptance cut in half among the treated cattle, compared to non-treated with lung adhesions.

“This much more dramatic impact on those that were treated suggests they were very seriously sick cattle,” Corah says.

Or the non-treated cattle got sick earlier in their lifetime.

“That tells me those cattle had likely been challenged before and probably weren’t challenged in the feedlot,” Busby says. “That’s why they gained better and had better quality grades than the treated calves with lung adhesions.”

The TCSCF has strict vaccination and preconditioning protocols.

“In principle, these should be lower-risk cattle than industry averages,” Corah says. “Even so, we see the tremendous economic consequences of health problems when they occur.”

Busby explains that the program’s setup makes it somewhat unique.

“These people are retaining ownership, so it’s in their financial interest to get the cattle properly vaccinated, weaned and preconditioned. Ultimately, they’re the ones that pay the bill,” he says. “If we’re at 4.1% lung adhesions, my guess is that the industry would be higher than that.”

Other research in the project showed cattle treated twice for disease had 14% mortality rate and had a treatment cost of \$54.07. That compared to a death loss of nearly zero on non-treated cattle and 5.49% on those treated just once.

“Health problems are huge challenges for feedlots because these are costs that go above and beyond the daily operation of feeding cattle,” Corah says. In addition to veterinary expenses, sick cattle require extra labor inputs, he explains.

Those treated twice for disease also suffered an 18 percentage-point drop in cattle grading Choice and above. CAB decreased from 21.4% to 14.8%.

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