

Haskell County Animal Hospital

Animal Health Update

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INCREASING SPACE CAN DECREASE MORTALITY

Bovine Respiratory Disease (BRD) continues to be one of the most costly health issues we deal with in the feeding industry. In a study released by the USDA in 1992, BRD was responsible for economic losses of \$624 million in mortality alone. If you factor in other losses from reduced performance, treatment costs and labor, the economic impact could be as much as three times this amount.

One factor that has possibly the greatest impact on health is stress. The level of stress a load of cattle arriving at the feedyard encounters often dictates the health and performance outcomes. Many of the stresses calves deal with are unavoidable such as weaning, marketing, transportation and environmental. These stressors are difficult at best to manage. Some stresses calves encounter are more manageable. These include providing adequate nutrition on arrival, following proper cattle handling techniques, reducing co-mingling, utilizing efficacious preventative health products and allowing for animal comfort.

Animal comfort may be one of the most overlooked management steps. Overcrowding animals in their pen is a large stressor. This is also true of the hospital pens. It is vitally important that calves in receiving pens be allowed adequate space.

Recommendations are to allow 150-200 square feet of pen space per head and 12-18 inches of bunk space per head. This is especially important in the first 30-45 days on feed.

The following data from a starting yard shows that over populating pens can indeed increase sickness rate and inflate mortality. Pens were categorized by percent capacity. Those with greater than 100% capacity and those with less than 100% capacity. A total of 66 pens were evaluated. Sixty two percent of the pens had greater than 100% capacity.

	<u>Avg. % Capacity</u>	<u>Morbidity</u>	<u>Mortality</u>
Greater than 100% capacity	121%	24%	2.7%
Less than 100% capacity	89%	21%	1.7%

The cost analysis shows that the increase in mortality in the over populated pens increased costs by \$3.80 per head in the yard and the increase in morbidity increased costs by \$.34 per head in the yard. Total losses in morbidity and mortality caused by over populating pens amounted to \$4.14 per head. We can also assume that there are performance costs associated with over crowding although these costs were not measured in this case.

This is a classic example of the stresses of over crowding. In this instance it increased the sickness rate by 14% and mortality by 59%.

Adequate pen and bunk space become more important during times when we typically deal with more health problems - the fall. Pay attention to pen capacity and you will very likely improve your outcomes.