

Ag. News

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Growth Promoting Implants: Don't Overlook an Opportunity

Though controversial for some, growth hormone implants are a valuable tool for agricultural producers who raise and produce beef cattle. For producers, heavier is generally better, at least when it comes to calves at market. And the easiest way to put on 20 pounds is to use an implant. Implants are one of the most underutilized technologies. One reason producers may not use implants is because they don't know what they are.

Hormone implants that are researched and approved by FDA to be safe are implanted into the steer or heifer to help it gain more weight than a non-implanted beef would. Implanted cattle show a 15 percent to 20 percent gain over non-implanted cattle.

There are three types of implants on the market – low and high dose estrogen, high potency trembolone and estrogen combinations. Some are sex specific or age specific.

Implants work in conjunction with the animal's feed program, working best when they receive proper nutrition.

For maximum implant benefit, calves should gain at least a pound per day while suckling on their mother. Generally, the faster the calves gain, the greater the implant response.

There are several approved implants for nursing steers and heifers and for cattle in the feedyard. Producers need to read implant labels. Many implants should not be used on calves less than 30-45 days old. Implanting prior to that time, such as at birth, has been shown to cause fertility problems in heifers intended for replacements. No implants are currently labeled for use in bull calves intended for future use as herd sires.

At a recent cattleman's clinic, they demonstrated the best techniques for implanting cattle. The proper place for implantation is the middle third of the backside of the ear.

First and foremost, producers need to keep instruments clean. I recommend using an old paint tray and a kitchen sponge. Add a small amount of disinfectant and run the needle across the sponge between animals. A major cause of implant failure is because of improper needle disinfecting. The sponge may also be used to wipe the surface of the ear clean.

The second most common reason for implant failure is when the implant gets inadvertently crushed due to forceful administration. It is best to withdraw the needle slightly as the implant is deposited to avoid crushing it. Some companies also manufacture a special implant gun with a retractable needle.

A third reason implants often fail is because someone gets in a hurry. Instead of putting it under the skin, they put the needle all the way through the ear and it just shoots out.

After the work is done, cattle producers should clean instruments and protect any leftover implants. Implants are degradable. Keep them stored in an airtight, waterproof bag or container in the house – don't throw them under the truck seat.

Additional information on implanting including a complete list of approved implants can be obtained at the local county Extension office.