Clean Equipment is Important for Animal Health

Harvest is in full force for some farmers and just getting started for others. At the same time, many producers are looking at weaning the calves born in the spring or starting to see the first fall-born calves hitting the ground now. Even though many farmers are out in the fields they still need to be conscious about keeping their equipment clean to keep their cattle healthy. Animal health equipment is one of many considerations when providing good care for your cattle. Beef producers typically own several different types of animal health equipment. Taking a little time to consider what equipment you need, how you will keep it clean, and the best methods to make sure it is well-maintained will serve you well as you go about the daily tasks of caring for your herd.

Some of the common animal health equipment likely to be found on many ranches include portable squeeze chutes and handling facilities, scales to collect body weight, warming crates for calves when born in cold conditions, AI (artificial insemination) supplies, calving chains and calf jacks for use in case of calving difficulty, ear tag pliers, tattoo pliers, castration and dehorning tools, and syringes and needles. While we all search for the best value when buying animal health equipment, precautions must be taken into consideration. Equipment that breaks easily or that won’t reliably perform its function is never considered a bargain no matter what the purchased price. The best source for your equipment needs depends on your geographic area and priorities.

Keeping equipment clean around the farm is always good advice, but cleanliness for animal health equipment is extremely important in keeping the proper health of the animals. In general, washing with hot water, soap, and appropriate brushes or other utensils is usually a good place to start. Many types of equipment will come with manufacturers’ recommendations to follow. However, use caution when working with disinfecting detergents are they can easily destroy the ability of vaccines to work effectively. Syringes should be thoroughly cleaned with soap and warm water followed by boiling them to kill any germs without leaving a residue that can harm vaccines. Always clean, syringes between uses as it is important to not use a syringe for one product followed by another product without a thorough cleaning in between uses. There is the potential for certain diseases in cattle that can be spread by very small amounts of blood. This can even include the trace of blood left on tattoo pliers, tagging instruments, castrating knives, and injection needles. To help stop the spread of diseases like anaplasmosis and bovine leukosis, instruments that contact blood should be rinsed or wiped off between uses to remove all traces of blood.

Maintenance done is just as important to the equipment as it is to have it properly cleaned. Producers should ensure that calf jacks are correctly maintained and that calf chains are free of rust after each calving season. That way these tools are ready for use when the time comes to use them. All equipment should be examined closely for signs of wear or problems that you can address, and to recognize when you need to send equipment to an expert for repair. Maintenance and service instructions provided with new equipment should be followed to ensure that your equipment is ready to use when you need it. For items that may break during routine use, having at least one backup is probably a good idea.
Cleaning and maintaining animal health equipment are important considerations when implementing BQA (Beef Quality Assurance) on your cattle operation. This includes proper care and use of syringes and needles to prevent injection site problems, keeping animal handling equipment in good working condition to prevent bruising or injury, and having clean, reliable equipment for use when assisting difficult births or dealing with other health emergencies to ensure good animal care and welfare.

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