



### **Animal Health & Nutrition Specialists!**

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### **Producing Feeder Cattle**

The feedlot industry has become a vital part of the Australian beef industry over the last 20 years. Many producers now specifically target the feed on market for their turn off and have altered management and genetics to meet this market's specifications. The feedlot industry will often pay a sizable premium for the right type of animal and for those with a history of performing well. The key to feedlot performance is that the animal has a quiet temperament, goes onto feed quickly and does not get sick.

The single most important factor in improving feedlot performance is a good yard weaning program. Weaners need to be weaned in the yards for 5-7 days with some human presence each day. Weaners should not be let out until all animals are eating from the trough. Trials in northern NSW have found that properly yard weaned cattle had a much lower incidence of sickness requiring removal from the feedlot pens than did paddock weaned or yard trained cattle. They also averaged over 0.15kg per day better weight gain in the feedlot and went onto feed quicker.

Entry to the feedlot is a stressful experience where stock are mustered, transported, kept off feed and sometimes water, mixed with strange stock and exposed to dust and diseases. Stress will lower the immunity of a beast and therefore it's ability to fight off disease. As a sick animal has reduced weight gain and may need to be pulled from the feedlot pen to be sold or treated, the percentage of sick animals is crucial for feedlot profitability. Pre feedlot vaccinations particularly for Bovine Respiratory Disease (3-4 weeks prior to entry) prior to entry will help reduce the incidence of sickness in feedlots. Talk to your feedlot buyer about vaccination.

Quieter cattle with a lower measured flight time have been shown to have higher rate of gain in feedlots. Cattle can be made quieter through both genetics and handling but whichever way by making cattle quieter feedlot performance can be improved. If cattle are being bred for feedlots bulls can be selected using EBVs for feed conversion efficiency.

To achieve feedlot entry weights, to ensure the finished beast meets the market specifications, the beast must gain at an average of half a kilogram per day. A severe growth check any time from before birth can limit the beast's ability to do this. Proper feeding at weaning and supplementation during any dry times can allow the delivery of stock young enough that they will still be milk tooth at the completion of feeding.

When stock from many sources are mixed together they must re-establish the pecking order and also expose each other to different diseases. Ideally a feedlot pen would only hold stock that had socialised together from weaning.

By using a well managed weaning and supplementation program along with the right genetics stock that will perform well in feedlots can be consistently produced ensuring repeat buyers and possible premiums. A full vaccination program and presale Bovine respiratory disease vaccination can reduce the incidence of sickness and improve performance in feedlots. Knowing the age and weight of stock required by the buyer and ensuring that the nutrition available allows the stock to reach these weights is also essential.