



**COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION**

Colorado State University Extension
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Proper Preconditioning for Better Pricing

The time to begin preconditioning calves is here. The fall sale run will begin in a few short weeks. Still many producers do not prepare their cattle for sale time or at least do not prepare early enough.

At our recent Pasture to Profit program in Burlington, Jim Santomaso, owner and auctioneer of Sterling Livestock Commission, spoke and testified on the value of properly preconditioned calves versus those that were not. In his observations at his sale facility, calves who were 45 to 50 days weaned and vaccinated received the best possible price based on their size and weight. He stated producers, whose calves who were not properly preconditioned, needed to be prepared to take a “discounted” price compared to properly preconditioned calves.

In the beef industry, 30 days weaned and vaccinated is considered the minimum. Dr. Derrell Peel, Oklahoma State University Extension Livestock Marketing Specialist, recently stated “...buyers strongly prefer calves to be weaned at least 45 days. Recent data and preliminary analysis suggest that weaning periods of 60, 75 and up to 90 days or more bring additional premiums.” Jim Santomaso reaffirmed this as he sees producers bring calves to market who have been vaccinated and weaned just long enough “to get the bawl out” and they receive a lower price than equivalent calves who have been properly preconditioned.

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For calves to receive that best price on sale day, producers need to have completed specific tasks. First, calves have been weaned at least 45 days. Vaccinations have been done and boosters completed prior to sale day. Bull calves should be castrated and healed. Calves need to be “bunk broke” and accustomed to consuming a grain based ration. A producer should communicate to the livestock sale or the potential buyers prior to the selling that these things have been done. And of course, producers should follow good handling practices during the highly stressful weaning and vaccinating process.

Producers want to receive the best price possible for their calves and you only get to sell them once. Proper preconditioning can prevent taking those unwanted discounts. The efforts put in now will pay off in the near future.

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