

Branding & Turnout

Best Practices for Success in Cow-Calf Operations

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First & Foremost

Branding day is one of the most important and physically demanding events in the cow-calf calendar. Done right, it's a critical window to protect calf health, establish permanent identification, and set the stage for a productive grazing season. Here's how to maximize your turnout success.



Efficiency starts before the first calf hits the ground

Now is a great time to plan ahead and gather your team. Confirm your chute setup, restraint equipment, and vaccine coolers are ready well in advance. A well-organized and properly trained crew reduces stress on cattle and minimizes the time each calf spends restrained. Stressed calves mount a weaker immune response to vaccines, so a calm, quiet working environment isn't just humane — it's good medicine.

Use a PLS Vaccine Protocol

A core branding protocol typically includes a clostridial (blackleg) vaccine and consideration of a 5-way viral vaccine combination depending on your operation's history and risk profile. Pinkeye vaccine is also a consideration for this time of year. Follow cold-chain requirements diligently. Vaccines stored above 45°F or exposed to direct sunlight lose efficacy rapidly. Administer subcutaneously or intramuscularly per label, and rotate injection sites.

Calf age & health status

Ideal branding age is 2–3 months, when calves are large enough to handle safely but young enough that maternal antibody interference is waning. Calves showing signs of pneumonia, scours, or joint ill should be flagged for treatment rather than processed through the chute with the healthy cohort.

Castration & Dehorning

Both procedures are best performed at this age when stress, hemorrhage risk, and recovery time are minimized. Use sharp, clean instruments, consider a pain management protocol (consult a Profectus vet), and monitor for complications in the days following.

Records & Follow-Up

Record every calf processed. Tag number, dam, breed, sex, weight, and vaccines administered will become the foundation of your herd health and genetic selection program. Plan a booster for modified-live viral vaccines 3–4 weeks later if your protocol requires it. A well-executed branding day protects your investment and builds the foundation for healthy, high-performing calves all the way to market.

Deworming at Turnout: A High-Return Investment

Deworming calves at branding time is one of the highest-return interventions available to cow-calf producers. Young calves have limited immunity to internal parasites and are highly susceptible to gastrointestinal nematodes. Even subclinical parasite burdens will suppress feed intake, impair nutrient absorption, and block immune responses, meaning your vaccine investment may underperform in heavily parasitized calves. **Research consistently shows dewormed calves going to pasture gain 15–30 lbs more over a grazing season compared to untreated cohorts**, with no additional inputs required. Strategic deworming at this processing point also makes logistical sense: you already have the calf restrained and the crew assembled. Pour-on macrocyclic lactones (ivermectin, doramectin) or injectable formulations are commonly used, though your veterinarian can help tailor product selection based on your region's parasite pressure, resistance patterns, and whether concurrent fly control is a priority. Treating cows at the same time further reduces pasture contamination and larval challenge for the calf crop throughout the grazing season

Have Questions?

Give PLS a call at 800-626-7768

Spring Updates

Market Comments from PLS CFO Dan Greve
 Tick and Fly Control Innovations
 PLS is Hiring



Cattle markets navigating a volatile stretch

Futures and cash prices are both reflecting a complex mix of historically tight supplies, record-high replacement costs, and macro-economic headwinds that are increasingly spilling into ag commodities.

On the CME

April live cattle settled around \$234.575, while the March feeder cattle contract closed near \$355.625. That's a remarkable year-over-year story: fed cattle prices have risen roughly 20% from a year ago, while 850lb feeder steers have surged about 35% over the same period, meaning replacement costs are significantly outpacing finished cattle prices. That cost-price squeeze is the defining challenge facing feedlot operators this spring.

Cash markets have been choppy

A significant wildcard looms: a potential labor stoppage at JBS in Greeley, CO is hanging over the market, as any production loss would dent packer demand for fed cattle and pressure cash prices further. Counterbalancing this, beef export sales for the week ending March 5th were the largest since February 2023, totaling over 25,000 metric tons — a bullish demand signal that should provide underlying support.

The hog complex is telling a different story

Lean hog futures rallied sharply in mid-week trading, with April contracts settling around \$96.075 and May reaching \$101.350. The CME Lean Hog Index has been grinding higher, and the national base hog price climbed to \$92.77, reflecting strengthening fundamentals as the market moves toward spring grilling season. Disease concerns and tighter-than-expected hog numbers have lent additional support. Forward contracts are pricing in a meaningful premium, with summer months carrying a bullish tone.

The bottom line

Cattle feeders face a challenging margin environment with record feeder cattle costs and deferred futures trading at a discount to today's cash. Risk management tools — including LRP and futures hedges — deserve serious attention right now. Meanwhile, hog producers are seeing improving fundamentals with a positive seasonal tailwind ahead.

As always, your Profectus team is here to help you navigate both the animal health and feed input needs for your operation.

Are you prepared to fight flies (and ticks) this spring and summer? PLS is here to help.

Medgene Tick & Fly Vaccinations

These vaccines are designed to use the animal's immune system to produce antibodies that prevent horn flies and ticks from being able to take a blood meal from the animal.



Curious about either of these fly control strategies? Contact your PLS rep to learn more & get ahead of the flies this spring. 800-626-7768



Kunafin wasps are used to kill the fly larvae (maggots) before they become adults. This can reduce up to 85% of the adult fly population on your operation and the amount of insecticide product you use.

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