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 To Implant or Not to Implant?

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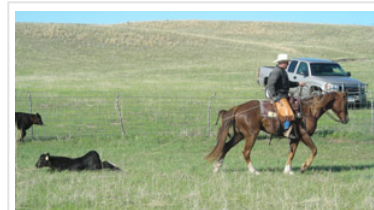
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As we enter this branding season, producers may be asking themselves the following questions:

1. Will implanting at branding time affect the price of the calves when sold in the fall?
2. Is implanting calves at branding time worth the investment?

While it has been well documented that implants can improve average daily gain (ADG) from implanting at branding until weaning, the use of this technology has decreased in the last 20 years. In a recent study by Seeger et al. (2011), the authors analyzed the sales of 5 million calves sold through video auctions and reported that the percentage of lots marketed as implanted decreased from 64.3% in 1995 to 26.5% in 2009. The National Animal Health Monitoring System (NAHMS, 2008) reported that only 9.8% operations with less than 50 cows used calftood implants while those greater than 200 cows reported 26.9% usage.

Much of the decrease can be attributed to the assumption that non-implanted calves will bring more dollars at sale time. This may have been the case in 1995 when there was a smaller supply of non-implanted



It has been well documented that implants can improve ADG from implanting at branding until weaning. Photo courtesy of Troy Walz.

calves. In a recent analysis of calves offered for sale through Superior Livestock from 2010 to 2013 by Rogers et al. (2015), the authors found that the implant status of the calves had no effect on final price for each of the four years the study was conducted. The percentage of lots that were implanted each year of the study was 28.4, 30.3, 30.5, and 29.0.

With the cost of a calfhood implant (Ralgro or Synovex C) at less than \$1.50 per head it will only take a few pounds to pay for the cost as well as your time. A study by Dr. Clay Mathis at New Mexico State University reported an increase in weaning weight from 3 to 32 pounds (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. Average weaning weight and values for calves either receiving a Synovex-C implant at branding (1 to 3 months of age) or not implanted¹

	Weight, lb			Value, \$/hd		
	Implant	No Implant	Difference	Implant	No implant	Difference
2003	569	537	32	524.13	515.43	8.70
2004	601	598	3	651.40	644.93	6.47
2005	547	536	11	645.42	639.58	5.84
2006	479	457	22	607.39	590.86	16.53
2007	533	510	23	637.26	626.57	10.69
5 yr avg	546	528	18	613.12	603.47	9.65

¹ Synovex-C™ contains 10 mg estradiol benzoate and 100 mg progesterone

Dr. Clay Mathis, New Mexico State University, 2010

The difference in growth response from the implant may be driven by environmental factors such as grass quality and availability. Recent moisture this spring should improve the chances of good grass production but long term weather forecasts for the summer are predicting above average temperatures with average rainfall for much of the Northern Plains.

While it is known that we will get a response in ADG if grass production is adequate, we cannot accurately predict what the growth response may be. We do know that if we choose not to implant, the market may not offer enough premiums for the weight gain sacrificed.

For additional information please see the [“Implants in Nursing Calves \(cattleproduction/implants-nursingcalves\)”](#) article.

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Sources

- NAHMS (National Animal Health Monitoring System. 2008. Beef 2007-08. Part I: Reference of Beef Cow-Calf Management Practices in the United States, 2007-08. USDA, Washington, DC.
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