



Common Use Needles with Cattle Has Its Costs

It's convenient no doubt, but using a common needle to give more than one injection to cattle has its costs. There are multiple blood born diseases transmitted by those needles, just like AIDS is transmitted in people. These two are certainly economically important, but it's hard to measure the costs. The first is bovine leukosis which is caused by a virus. The virus causes a variety of cancer problems in cattle. Producers see it most commonly as big lumps wherever there are lymph nodes and once the lumps are visible, the cattle usually are condemned at slaughter. Only about 5% of the cattle infected with the virus ever get the cancer form. But the virus causes a production drag, not huge but it goes right to a producer's bottom line, his profits. The production drag is milk yield, reproductive health, and just general health. For this reason, some farms are starting to develop Leukosis control programs, and they will be more prevalent as other more obvious diseases are controlled.

The second disease is Anaplasmosis, which historically was a disease of down south and especially out west because ticks transmitted it. The disease causes the destruction of red blood cells, but if an animal contracts the disease when young, say a nursing calf out on the range at age 2 months, the calf can replace the red cells fast enough that the calf's immune system will overcome the disease and the calf will recover with no treatment. Older animals require treatment with tetracycline and if caught early they also recover. Every infected animal carries the disease for life and their blood on a needle can infect another animal. With calves going south and west for rearing, Anaplasmosis is slowly working its way into Wisconsin dairies. When dairy cows are infected, they often present as dead. They had a fever, and towards the end they breath rapidly because they are losing blood cells, but it is easy to miss the symptoms. One sign is that the animals will often turn yellow from the ruptured blood cells. I'm sure that this is often missed, but in a large dairy, acute dead animals, if you're not going to have a veterinary do a necropsy, you might want to look at the eyes and the gums and see if they are yellow, and maybe get some testing done if they are. This is a good discussion topic with your herd vet.

Quotes from Milton Friedman, the Nobel prize winning economist Dr. Al admires most. He died in 2006.

"If you put the Federal Government in charge of the Sahara Desert, in 5 years there'd be a shortage of sand."

"Nothing is so permanent as a temporary government program."

"We have a system that increasingly taxes work and subsidizes nonwork."

"Inflation is taxation WITHOUT legislation."

Were Bison Better for the Land than Cattle?

One theory or argument put forward for years with regards to pasture management was that herds of bison were good for the prairies. They came through, overgrazed, churned the soil, and deposited manure. Thus, mob grazing was developed where a pasture was loaded with cattle for a short period. Recent research over 8 years in Nebraska debunked this theory, plus over half the grasses were trampled and unused by the cattle. Again, the wild west wasn't so great, and it maybe wasn't so environmentally green either.

For What it's Worth: When I was in college and I got a question wrong on an exam, I would always look up the correct answer, or if I didn't understand why an answer was wrong, I would go talk to a professor. In retrospect, the answers to the questions I got wrong stuck with me better than the answers I got right. I guess that means the kids that got F's and flunked out learned the most.

Newlywed Couple Has Fun with Backyard Farming

I'm going to pick on my foster son and his wife. His wife is the daughter of one of our dairy farmers, and Ryan and Britt live on a farm I own just down the road. It's a blessing they live so close, and I really enjoy them being almost next door. But being newlyweds in the country there are temptations involving hobby farming.

The farm had an old chicken coop on it. It was in OK shape, and the foundation appeared good even though it was absolutely packed with junk. Really, who breaks a hammer handle, and puts the head and broken handle back on the shelf, next to two other broken hammers. Two years cleaning up junk.

This spring, Brittany had the opportunity to get 10 chickens from a schoolteacher when school let out. She cleaned out part of the chicken coop, it's quite roomy, and set up to raise layers. The coop wiring was dangerous looking so I disconnected it for the summer. Over the spring the 10 chickens turned into 3 hens and 7 roosters. They were a motley group of various colors and attitudes. Brittany left them outside daily to free range and Ryan sealed the coop up to hopefully keep out weasels and mink. A mink would actually have been a blessing. Egg production peaked at 3 eggs a day on a good day.

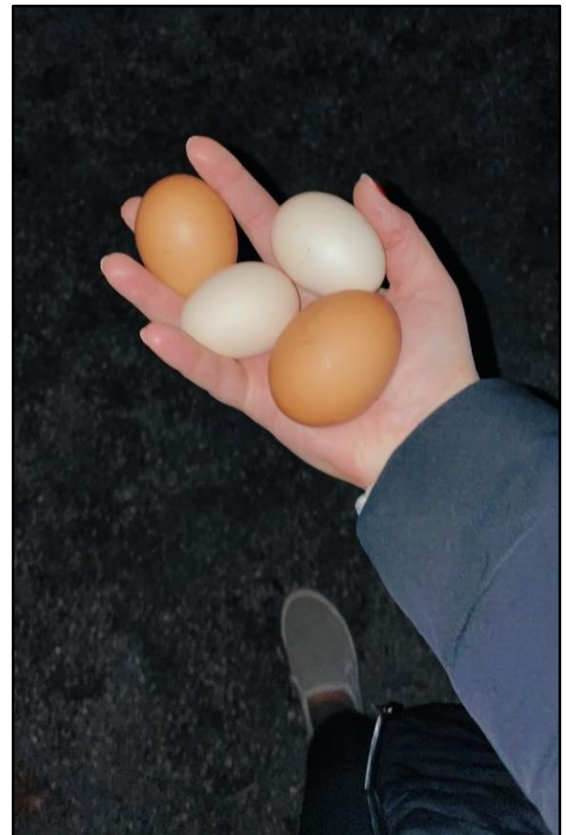
When one of the roosters decided to attack Britt and then my grandson, I went over for an hour one afternoon and Ryan and I harvested chicken for Bar-B-Q sandwiches, which were quite good, but Britt probably had about \$25 a pound invested in them. Egg production peaked at 3 eggs a day on a good day.

Late summer, egg production was at 3 per day, and Brittany was given 4 more younger chickens by Carrie Sue. You may know Carrie Sue from our blood lab. She's raised chickens forever, and her chicken raising ability and chicken psychology is excellent. The 4 chickens turned into 3 hens and one rooster. Egg production was at 3 per day on good days.

In October, I buried all the electric power to the 3 outbuildings that I thought were worth keeping and removed all the overhead drops from the May Pole. A new electric panel went into the chicken coop, along with GFI plugs and a new light switch at the door, the old switch being 25 feet into the building. Carrie Sue thought maybe there were eggs being laid outside because these chickens ranged at least a quarter mile from the farm. So, Britt stopped letting them free range. I was hoping for a few eggs as building rent, or a return on the wiring investment but egg production was still three eggs a day.

In mid-November, Ryan and I were tearing an old deck off the house, and all the chickens trooped by, 6 hens and 3 roosters, they were back free ranging, after all, there's some corn scattered in the corn field and the chickens eat less when free ranging. I looked at Ryan and said, maybe we should butcher 9 chickens and you should start over in the spring. Britt had mentioned the same thing earlier in the day. Still at 3 eggs on a good day.

I'm actually an advocate of backyard animals, especially for kids. My daughter raised pigs for the fair one year. We had rabbits for years. But there are two caveats. First, accept backyard farming is a hobby, and hobbies can be expensive. Think boats, except animals eat and dung every day. Bigger animals, bigger costs. The second caveat is facilities. Cattle need head locks; beef cattle need chutes. So, when people move to the country and think they are saving money spent on meat by raising steers, I tell them to grow potatoes.



More chickens started producing shortly after Dr. Al wrote this article. Brittany is pictured holding 4 eggs, instead of the regular 3.