



THE DOC IS IN

By Nicole Dempsey

Three Benefits of Accurate Animal Weights

Custom heifer raisers were some of the first in the industry to actively utilize livestock weigh scales. At a minimum, they weigh heifers at arrival and when they leave – especially if they get paid on performance. Scales help determine growth rates, monitor average daily gains and even detect underperformers sooner.

But more opportunity exists.

1. Improve efficiency
A lot has changed in how dairy heifers are fed. Now it's about feeding heifers to meet their potential. University research suggests a target of 1.8-2.2 lbs. of gain per day through the first 150 days of age. During the next 150 days, the target

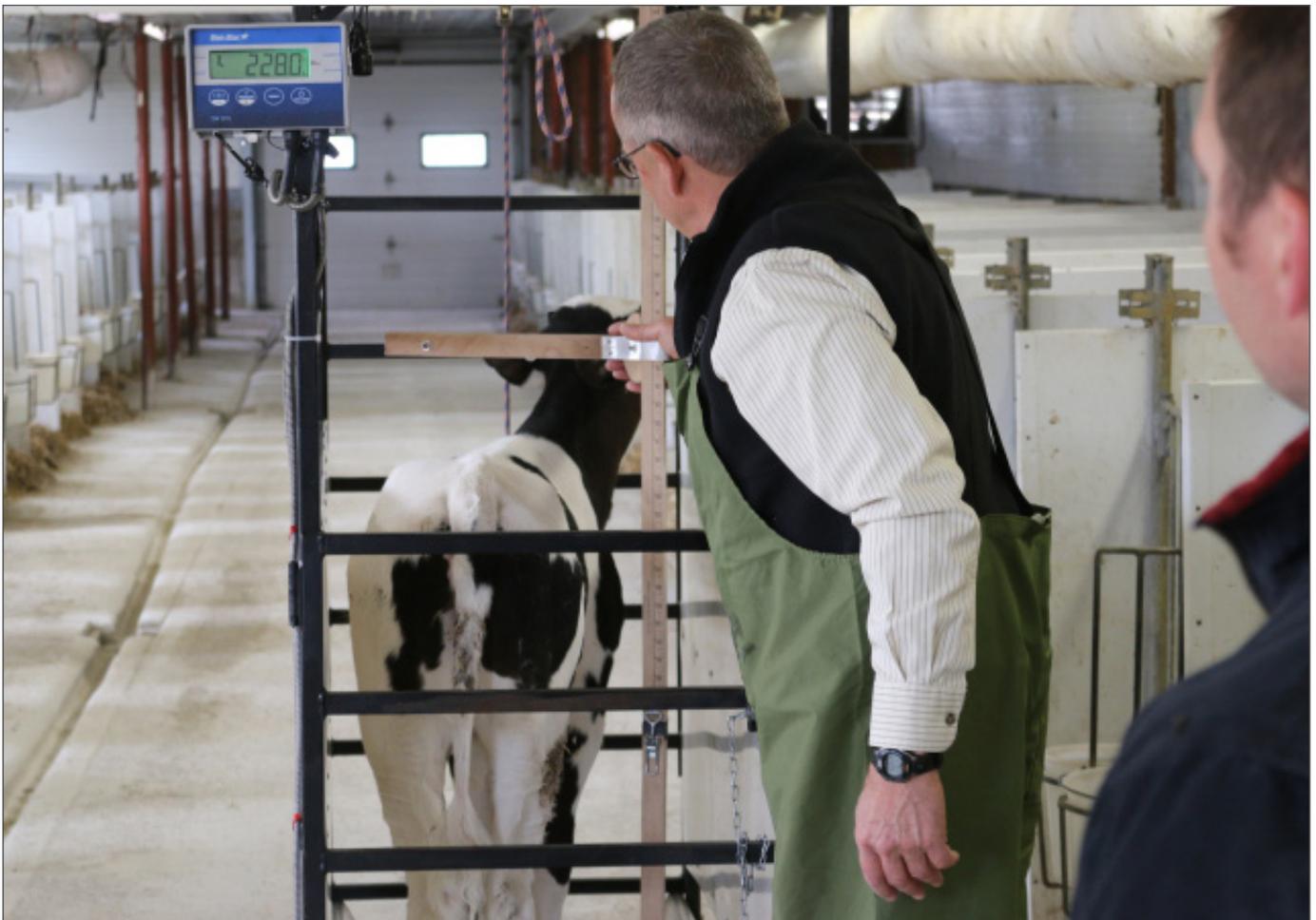
becomes 1.6-1.8 lbs. per day.

It's hard to manage what you can't measure. Using a digital on-farm scale to help you achieve accurate weights can provide average daily gains and feed efficiency data for heifers of all ages.

Armed with accurate data, producers can make cost-saving management decisions earlier in the growth process.

2. Ensure proper dosage
Healthy heifers are better performers. Routine vaccinations and deworming are two preventative practices used to help keep heifers healthy and growing. When it becomes necessary to treat an animal, the correct dose of medication is often determined by the animal's weight. If you don't have an accurate weight, you risk under or overdosing the animal.

For example, if you underestimate weight and you don't use enough of a vaccine, you may not get an adequate im-



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mune response. Likewise, with antibiotics, under-dosing can lead to increased recovery time, which may lead to subsequent treatments or chronic illness. Overdosing can potentially be harmful to the animal, in addition to increasing costs. Excess medication is money down the drain. Successful treatment requires a full course

of therapy with the correct dosage of the right medication. Obtaining accurate weights should be part of your standard treatment protocols.

The same is true with lactating cows. While there are general guidelines of animal weight by breed for cows, that is just a starting point. A mature cow with a body condition score of 2.0 does not weigh the same as a mature cow with a body condition score of 3.5. For treatment to be successful, you need to follow label directions and give the proper dose. When the label says, for example, 1.5ml/100 lbs, obtaining an accurate weight may help improve treatment outcomes and provide the most cost-effective dose.

3. Avoid residues
As previously mentioned, without obtaining accurate weights, overdosing the animal does become a potential risk.

Any administered dose that is above the recommended dose on the label – even if it is accidental – is, by definition, an extra-label drug use. This will increase the withholding time for milk and meat to prevent drug residues. In order to have a safe and efficient operation, ensuring precise animal weights is critical when administering treatment drugs.

Using a livestock scale to help ensure maximum efficiency, administering proper dosage and residue prevention can increase your herd's return on investment. In addition, it also increases your ability to be transparent in your health and management protocols, supporting your efforts to produce a safe and quality product. *

Nicole Dempsey is a livestock scale product specialist with Digi-Star. Contact Nicole at (920) 568-6213 or email: nicole.dempsey@digi-star.com.



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