Vaccinations and Dexter Cattle

A controversial topic in the Dexter community is vaccinations. Some people believe in raising their cattle vaccine-free, and others prefer to vaccinate their entire herd. There is nothing wrong with either of these approaches; however, I will explain it from a practical standpoint in this essay.

Vaccinating cattle is a preventative measure that anyone can use. However, from a logical perspective, it depends mainly on a couple of things; the size of your herd, the relative size of your land, and your farm’s geographical area. For example, if you are raising a cow/calf pair and a steer on a few acres, they have plenty to eat and are not packed in together; therefore, their risk of transmissible disease is lower. On the contrary, in a commercial feedlot, where cattle are packed in and do not have room to graze, animals have a higher chance of disease. A small family farm that consists of a few breeding stock cattle and a steer or two likely does not have any reason to vaccinate their cattle, whereas large feedlots or commercial dairy farms would be better off inoculating their animals. You overall geographic location should also be considered. Two primary considerations would be your neighbors and your region. If you live next to a feedlot or a livestock auction yard where many different animals are moved in and out on a regular basis, you might consider vaccinations. Some regions of the world may be more prone to certain diseases that should be vaccinated for. It would be wise to consult with your local veterinarian and agricultural offices for recommendations for your local area.

There is an exception to this rule, though; when castrating steers, tetanus prevention is often given. This is because when banding a steer, they have an increased possibility of contracting C. tetani, the bacteria that causes tetanus. The bacteria, which is incredibly resistant to high temperatures and disinfectants, can survive for years and germinates in areas where there is dead or rotten tissue and no oxygen. This results in rapid growth of tetanus neurotoxin (TeNT). This toxin binds inseparably to the nerve endings and travels back to the spinal cord, resulting in spastic paralysis. Clinical signs of tetanus are commonly missed due to their subtlety, and by the time they are accurately diagnosed, it is often too late. For this reason, many cattle owners who use this process to castrate steers give a tetanus shot with it.

There are many Dexter owners with many different opinions on vaccines. Everyone has a different situation, so the best way for someone else may not be suitable for your farm at all. Obtaining help from more experienced owners is always a good idea, but analyzing your herd and land is the ideal way to determine if vaccinations are right for you.

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