# Challenging the way we've always done things: Managing chronic pens, fitness to transport and other welfare-type issues on the feedlot

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## Abstract

Chronic cattle, those with persistent injuries or diseases, pose significant welfare, economic, and ethical concerns for feedlot operations. This presentation will explore the epidemiology, management strategies, and future research directions for chronic cattle. Data from North American feedlots were analyzed to understand chronicity's prevalence, causes and outcomes. Findings highlight the importance of early diagnosis, appropriate treatment, and humane euthanasia when necessary. Emerging technologies, such as remote monitoring systems, offer the potential for improved disease detection and management. Future research should focus on developing evidence-based guidelines for chronic cattle care and addressing the behavioral impact of chronic conditions on both animals and caretakers.

**Key words:** chronic cattle, feedlot, animal welfare, euthanasia, technology

## Introduction

Chronic cattle, a population often overlooked in veterinary medicine, represent a significant challenge for feedlot operations. Their presence can negatively impact animal welfare, employee morale and the economic viability of cattle production enterprises. Understanding the factors contributing to chronicity is essential for developing effective management strategies and improving feedlot cattle's overall health and welfare. The prevalence of chronic cattle varies across feedlots. Data analysis from North American feedlots revealed common causes of chronicity, including respiratory disease and lameness disorders.

## Management

Effective management of chronic cattle requires a multi-faceted approach. Early diagnosis and prompt treatment are crucial for improving outcomes. Chronic pens should be designed to minimize stress, maximize comfort and facilitate monitoring. When treatment is ineffective or the animal's quality of life is severely compromised, humane euthanasia or salvage slaughter should be considered. This requires a sound data surveillance system, personnel trained based on animal behavior and continual and timely cattle assessment, and the designation of a level of oversight of the chronic pen.

## Discussion

Chronic cattle represent a significant challenge for feedlot operations. Maintaining high standards of animal welfare involves many moving parts. Emerging technologies, such as monitoring systems, offer promising tools for improving the management of sick cattle in different scenarios and allowing for timely intervention. By understanding the epidemiology, implementing effective management strategies, including effective caretaker training, and leveraging emerging technologies, we can improve the welfare of chronic cattle and mitigate the associated economic burden. Future research will be essential for developing evidence-based guidelines and addressing the complex issues surrounding chronic cattle care.



  