

How to prepare cattle for the 2018 RNA Paddock to Palate Competition. Presented by Mort & Co

With preparations well under way for the 2018 RNA Paddock to Palate Competition, presented by Mort & Co, exhibitors will be keen to start preparations on their livestock to ensure they maximise feedlot performance & put themselves in the best possible position to walk away with over \$56,000 in prize money.

Berry Reynolds, Mort & Co's Private Client Manager offers some advice to potential exhibitors to aid their preparation, "The Paddock to Palate Competition provides both commercial & stud producers with an opportunity to showcase & benchmark their genetics against some of the best in the business. It's also a conduit for exhibitors to gather crucial data on feedlot performance & carcass characteristics that are ultimate profit drivers in all livestock businesses. This information can then be used to assist both breeding & trading decisions whilst also being a valuable marketing tool for commercial or stud sales of livestock".

Berry offers a word of warning to would be exhibitors & squashes the common belief that to win a weight gain competition cattle should be limit fed prior to feedlot delivery, "limit feeding cattle before feedlot entry will generally not improve weight gains on feed, in fact it will heighten the chance of limiting rumen function & ultimately increase the likelihood of illness in feedlot. Both of these factors have an enormous effect on both carcass quality & grading characteristics", he said.

Instead Mr Reynolds recommends that steers should be kept on a healthy & rising plain of nutrition to aid growth without laying down too much fat. He says smart preparation of livestock prior to trucking and feedlot entry can have significant effect on how quickly cattle settle into their new surrounds, how easily they adapt to a grain based diet and ultimately how well they perform on feed.

Mort & Co also advocates the following strategies to ensure pre feedlot cattle preparation provides exhibited cattle with every opportunity to perform to their genetic potential.

- Select animals that show good weight for age characteristics. Ideally the Class 37 (100 day short-fed) cattle should be aged between 16 – 20 months (0 – 2 teeth) & weigh between 360 – 420 kg. **This year an entry weight limit of 420kg has been applied to all steers in class 37. i.e if a steer exceeds 420kg at arrival it will receive 0 points in the weight gain section.** Class 38 (70 day trade) cattle should be aged between 10 – 18 months. (0 teeth) & weigh between 320-360kg. **An upper weight limit of 380kg has been applied to all steers in class 38. i.e if a beast exceeds 380kg at arrival it will receive 0 points in the weight gain section.**
 - It is recommended feeding animals over 10 months of age as they have a more robust immune system and have the ability to compete in the feedyard
 - Yard wean and teach young cattle to eat from a bunk or trough. As a general rule, cattle that are familiar with yards, troughs and feed ingredients will settle into the feedlot environment & a grain feeding regime much faster than those who don't.
- Build a positive association between cattle and their handlers by implementing low stress stock handling practises.
- As a prerequisite for feedlot entry, all exhibitors are required to pre vaccinate their entries with a single shot of BoviShield MH as a precaution against Bovine Respiratory Disease (BRD) – check the Paddock to Palate schedule for further details
- Ensure cattle are well watered and fed prior to being trucked. Animals with rumen fill and good hydration on arrival to the feedlot will generally make the transition to a grain based diet more effectively & should not have their immune system compromised

- If cattle are from an area in drought it is advised that exhibitors explore supplementation options to ensure cattle that are “healthy on the inside”.
- If cattle reside in tick zones ensure that appropriate drenching regimes are adhered to so that cattle can clear the dips quickly & effectively on delivery to the feedlot.

Mr Reynolds said “Mort & Co looks forward to working proactively with the industry’s leading cattle producers keen to showcase their genetics. I’m absolutely sure that Mort & Co’s focus on animal health & welfare, management programs & operating systems combined with state of the art feedlot facilities & our unique ration composition will ensure that all exhibitors see the true genetic potential of the livestock that they work tirelessly & diligently to improve on a day to day basis”.

For more information contact: Berry Reynolds, 0418 928222, berry.reynolds@mortco.com.au