



Chris Norton

GREAT SOUTHERN REGION, WA

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Chris Norton runs cattle and sheep on a 1,000 hectare property in WA’s Great Southern Region. Situated halfway between Albany and Mount Barker, he sells around 200 calves a year to the Jarraluka Feedlot, which supplies beef to Woolworths. Chris admits he was fairly complacent about the risk of pestivirus on his farm until he went to a Jarraluka field day and heard a presentation by a local vet.

“We’ve lived with pestivirus for probably as long as cattle have been in this country, so I wasn’t planning on starting a vaccination program,” Chris said. “However, after the vet’s talk I noticed a lot of my calves had the classic pesti symptoms.”

“My sires are Murray Greys and the mothers mixed breed. Of the 300 calves a year, I’d be getting 4 or 5 with classic pesti birth defects like domed heads and deformed legs. At the time, I was shooting around \$2500 worth of stock a year, this was over decade ago so the value today would be substantially higher. I’d also get bad cases of scouring where calves would just get skinny and die. After that field day I had a better understanding of the science behind pestivirus and I started to think about how it might be costing me money,” he said.

Around the same time the Jarraluka Feedlot introduced a premium price for calves that had been vaccinated for pestivirus.

“The feedlot had big problems with pestivirus. They would take cattle from 20 – 30 properties and if any of them had no immunity to the virus they could get really sick. The feedlot had 90 – 100 days to fatten up the calves and couldn’t afford for any of them to do poorly, so they introduced the requirement that all calves must be vaccinated against pestivirus as a condition of purchase.”

We have been vaccinating the entire herd for over a decade now. We do all cows at the same time as the

7in1 Lepto vaccination, so it is quite easy to manage,” Chris said.

“I still have a tail in the herd, and some cases of scouring, but the number of birth deformities is greatly reduced.”

“You really need to do everything in your power to reduce losses. The vaccination isn’t cheap at around \$10 a head the first time you vaccinate them (with two doses) but I am not losing as many calves as before, so come sale time I’m ahead financially,” Chris said.

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Always on guard

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