

Hands-On Experience at the Ranch

A group of two veterinarians and four students recently traveled to the Eden Valley Ranch to perform pregnancy checks on 94 head of cattle. This field visit presented a wonderful hands-on opportunity for students to gain real-life experience working with livestock.

The most efficient way to diagnose a pregnancy is to perform a manual palpation. Since the uterine wall sits against the rectum, the test is done transrectally, where the clinicians and students feel for certain indicators of a pregnancy. If a pregnancy is in an advanced stage, the easiest thing to palpate is the fetus itself. However, early pregnancies are determined by palpating the fremitus (uterine artery), which grows as the fetus ages. Another indicator is the placentome, which is where the fetal blood supply is attached. Using a combination of these techniques, pregnancy can be confirmed and accurately staged within about two weeks, starting after 30 days.

The students took turns performing the pregnancy examinations and administering vaccinations to the cattle. Each cow was vaccinated for respiratory and reproductive viruses, bacterial reproductive diseases, and clostridial diseases. Faculty member Bret McNabb and resident Muzafar Makhdoomi conferred with each student about their findings and confirmed with their own examinations. The group efficiently finished the entire herd in under four hours.

Throughout the examinations, McNabb and Makhdoomi continually asked the students questions about different aspects of herd health. Nearly every minute of interaction with the students was used as a teaching opportunity. The students were inquisitive and eager to learn as much as they could on the trip.

In addition, the students examined the overall health of the herd, noticing the flesh tone, body position, and coat appearance. Also checked were their feet, legs and eyes. As each cow exited the chute, its gait was analyzed for lameness issues. Based on all of these observations, the herd was deemed in good health, and displayed no signs of systemic illness.



Veterinarians and students traveled to a large beef cattle operation to perform herd health examinations.