

2007 Cattle Industry Annual Convention & Trade Show

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Avoid Health Risks and Their Costs

Mistakes with a herd health program can prove costly.

by Troy Smith

NASHVILLE, TENN. (Jan. 31, 2007) — As with any business, risk management is a part of operating beef cattle enterprises. During a Wednesday morning Cattlemen's College session, veterinarians Dale Grotelueschen and Dee Griffin addressed herd health management to reduce the risk of disease and associated economic losses. Currently, the speakers agreed, beef producers have expanding options for controlling profit-robbing diseases.

According to Grotelueschen, biosecurity and biocontainment are important aspects

of programs for reducing health risks. Biosecurity, he said, is the sum of actions taken to prevent disease-causing agents from entering a herd, while biocontainment is the desired outcome of actions taken to control disease agents already present in a herd. Fundamental to successful application of these concepts are 1) increasing animal immunity, 2) eliminating the disease agent, and 3) preventing transmission between animals or herds.

"Vaccination is the most common practice used to shift immunity to higher levels," Grotelueschen stated. "However, in some cases, vaccination itself may not be sufficient to provide the levels of biosecurity or biocontainment desired. An example is the BVD (bovine viral diarrhea) virus."

The primary goal for BVD vaccination in breeding cattle is prevention of persistently infected (PI) BVD calves, but some PI calves may be born to vaccinated dams. Grotelueschen said this most often occurs if those dams were exposed to the virus at 45 to 120 days of gestation. Consequently, cow-calf operators may have to consider a more comprehensive BVD-control plan.

Calves may be tested for BVD, followed by testing of dams of positive calves. Dams that test positive can then be eliminated from the herd by selling for harvest. Through these steps, and by avoiding introduction of potentially BVD-infected animals to the breeding herd, it is possible to eliminate the virus from the herd.

It is important to prevent animal-to-animal transmission across fencelines, but also to address possible contamination of stock trailers that may have been used to

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— Dale Grotelueschen

transport animals capable of shedding the virus.

"Well-designed herd health programs take into account both exposure and immunity aspects of infectious disease control," Grotelueschen stressed.

Griffin, a feedlot veterinarian at the University of Nebraska Great Plains Veterinary Education Center, said the cost of postweaning respiratory disease represents about 7% of the center's total production cost, when compared to animals with healthy respiratory tracts. This includes the cost of products used for prevention, treatment medications and death loss, in addition to decreased feedlot performance and lower carcass values.

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►The cost of postweaning respiratory disease represents about 7% of the center's total production cost when compared to animals with healthy respiratory tracts, said Dee Griffin of the University of Nebraska Great Plains Veterinary Education Center.



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