



On the Move

Trichomoniasis is finding its way into the Midwest; your herd could be at risk.

Severe drought in the Southern Plains has caused a shift in cow numbers, as cattle are moved to areas in the Midwest where grass is available. And, with that shift comes an increase in the risk of diseases, like trichomoniasis (trich), that move with the cattle.

“Cows have been moving in and out of the Midwest, which always increases the disease risk,” says Dr. Doug Ensley, professional services veterinarian with Boehringer Ingelheim Vetmedica Inc. “In Iowa, they have found trichomoniasis for the first time this past year, so it is moving into new areas.”

Caused by a protozoan (*Trichomonas foetus*), trich is a venereal disease spread by bulls. With no visible signs, it can cause abortions and/or open or late-calving cows. It’s difficult to spot and can spread through a herd like wildfire.

Trich is getting more recognition by states, and more regulations are being developed to try to minimize the disease risk. It is a reportable disease in several states including Iowa, where it was first discovered last

spring. Once it is identified, the state department of agriculture will issue an order to quarantine the herd. That quarantine remains in place until further testing confirms the disease is no longer present in the herd. Lost income to producers from being unable to sell cattle while under quarantine is only the start of the economic impact of trich.

Herds that become infected usually see a 20-30% drop in pregnancy rates, which can be economically devastating to any producer. This drop in pregnancy rates usually occurs 50 to 60 days postbreeding (or around 90 days of gestation).

If producers are able to get those cows rebred, those calves will be born at least 60 days later than other calves in the herd. And, factoring in the average weight gain of 1.5 to 2 lb. per day, the late-born calf will be about 120 lb. lighter than those born earlier. At today’s prices, producers will take a significant loss.

Minimizing the risk of trich

Because this is a disease that goes with cattle movement, several states are monitoring the

bulls that cross their borders. “Most states have regulations to restrict the movement of breeding bulls,” Dr. Ensley says. “Bulls crossing state borders have to be trich-tested before they can enter the state.”

Trich-testing the female is generally unrewarding, but Dr. Ensley advises producers buying cows, especially bred cows, to buy those that are more than 120 days along in gestation. Most abortions or pregnancy loss from trich occurs around 90 days of gestation.

“I would be very selective with what you use as replacements in your herd,” adds Dr. Ensley. “If you are going to the sale barn to buy cows, make sure they are at least four months pregnant. And, if you are buying bulls, buy young bulls that haven’t been exposed to cows. That significantly reduces the risk of introducing trich to your herd.”

If trich is found in your area, Dr. Ensley recommends watching your cow herd closely. Check your fences to make sure that they are secure and that neighboring bulls aren’t visiting your cows. Pregnancy check your cows, monitor pregnancy rates, test your bulls and pay attention to what’s going on in the neighborhood.

“I would find out where the herd that tested positive for trich is located,” Dr. Ensley continues. “Is it close to you? If it is across the fence, you need to start preg-checking cows to

determine pregnancy rates. If trich is known to be in your area, it is also important to vaccinate with TrichGuard® or Trichguard V5L, because it only takes one exposure for your herd to become infected.” Additionally, in herds that leave the bull in year-round, he recommends pulling out your bulls, resting them for two weeks, testing them, resting them for two more weeks and retesting to ensure they are trich-negative.

Importance of vaccination

If your cow herd is facing the threat of trich, if the disease has been found in your area or if there is an influx of cows from outside herds, Dr. Ensley strongly recommends vaccination. But, he cautions that a vaccine must be used according to label directions to be most effective.

The first dose of the vaccination should be given approximately seven to eight weeks prebreeding, followed by a second dose three or four weeks later. The cows can be bred four weeks after the second vaccination.

“If your herd, or your neighbor’s herd, tests positive for trich, you should consider vaccinating for a couple of years until the bulls are negative and the cow herd has been cleaned up,” concludes Dr. Ensley. **HW**

— Article provided by
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