

## How to Spot Sick Animals in Your Herd

"If only I would have treated that calf sooner."

How many times have you said that to yourself as you loaded another sick animal on the trailer and headed to town in search of a miracle cure from your veterinarian?

"Early detection of sickness or disease is an essential part of a successful treatment and recovery program," says Dr. Korb Maxwell, DVM, a technical service veterinarian for Pfizer Animal Health. "The key is pulling the cattle early."

To help producers develop an effective program, Dr. Maxwell recommends establishing a routine schedule to check cattle and observing the animal's individual habits and behavior.

"There's a big difference between checking your cattle from the road just before dark and driving slowly through the pasture early in the morning and really observing them closely," he says. "If you don't look at your cattle frequently and survey them carefully, you won't notice the subtle changes that indicate a problem is developing."

Surveys show that respiratory illnesses account for the majority of health problems in young cattle. An elevated body temperature is one of the primary indicators that a respiratory infection is present in an animal. By looking for the outward signs, producers can detect illness much quicker.

"Animals that are starting to get sick behave much like humans," Dr. Maxwell says. "They are depressed, listless, lose their appetite and look like they don't feel well."

"One of the first signals of a problem is an animal off by itself. Also, if a calf looks gaunt, has a hollow-eyed appearance or drooping ears, it's probably feeling the effects of a high temperature."

Another factor Dr. Maxwell pays close attention to is the animal's breathing patterns. If one individual is breathing more rapidly than the others and blowing more steam on a cool morning, it probably has an elevated temperature. If it's pushing air with its belly, causing the flank to move excessively, this is a possible sign that the lungs are congested and a respiratory problem may be developing.

Nasal discharge is also an indicator. However, it shouldn't be over-emphasized because it's difficult to evaluate. On a chilly morning or after a dry, dusty period a nasal discharge may be the result of the animal's normal defense mechanism, not an indication of a respiratory infection.

Once signs of illness are observed, Dr.

Maxwell recommends pulling the animal and taking its temperature. This gives the producer, pen rider or practitioner a chance to accurately diagnose the illness, evaluate the severity and establish a benchmark to measure the success of the treatment. The information should be recorded on a permanent treatment card,

along with amount, type and site where the appropriate drug was used.

"Producers need to be alert to the first signs of illness and pull animals early or they may become too sick to quickly respond to treatment," Dr. Maxwell says. "Timing is critical in obtaining an effective antibiotic treatment."

### USDA Implements Changes in Brucellosis Rules

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is implementing six changes in the existing brucellosis regulations, including a provision to allow movement of cattle from approved intermediate handling facilities to quarantined feedlots. The changes are effective Dec. 20, 1991.

"Intermediate handling facilities are assembly points for cattle being transported over long distances," said Lonnie King, deputy administrator of USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. "Under current rules, these facilities may be used only for moving cattle directly to slaughter. Expanding the use of these facilities will make it easier to assemble full truckloads going to quarantined feedlots."

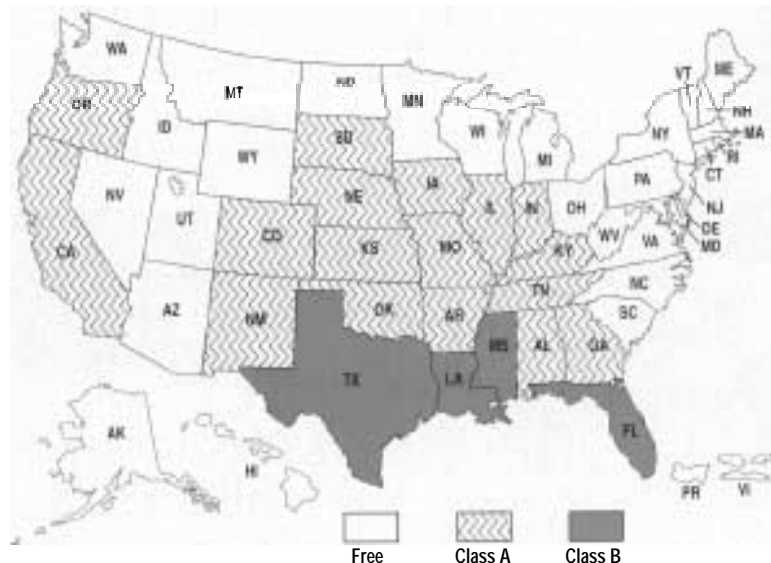
The other five changes will:

- Relax the present requirement that intermediate handling facilities be located apart from other livestock handling facilities. The change will require separation only from facilities handling breeding stock.
- Lower the minimum allowable potency of official calfhood vaccines to extend their shelf-life.
- Specify conditions under which the standard card test may be used as an official test for vaccinated animals at approved stockyards.
- Allow a herd to keep certification as brucellosis-free even if an animal is found to react to a diagnostic test, provided that other evidence, such as cultures from tissues or milk, demonstrates that the herd is not infected.
- Permit rodeo bulls to move interstate on the basis of a single annual test.

"Taken together, the six proposed changes will remove restrictions on the cattle industry without significantly increasing the risk of spreading brucellosis," King said. "Basically, the proposals accommodate changes in cattle movement and marketing and respond to other industry concerns."

#### Brucellosis Eradication

#### State Classification of Cattle



SOURCE: USDA Veterinary Services, Sept. 1991

## Veterinary Consultants Shift to Production Medicine

Advanced technologies are rapidly changing today's livestock industries. Veterinary consultants emphasizing production medicine take on a critical role in providing expertise to prevent disease, improve operations management, and increase profitability for producers, reports the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA).

For example, veterinarians report calving percentages close to 100 percent and weaning weights as high as 700 pounds (450 pound weaning weights are typical) for some California cattle ranchers implementing updated facilities design and handling practices.

"In recent years we've seen a shift from preventive herd health medicine to production medicine, which emphasizes health of the enterprise as well as health of the animals," says L. Kirk Clark, DVM, department of veterinary clinical medicine, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Ind. "Personal computers and software for recordkeeping and analysis are helping many veterinarians expand their expertise beyond disease treatment to become qualified consultants for total livestock operations."

Veterinarians are uniquely positioned to spot ills in the production unit because disease problems are often a sign of other failures in the system. For example, inadequate ventilation, poor nutrition and genetics are production factors that may contribute to disease outbreaks.

"Producers find it is cost-effective to work with a local veterinary consultant because it is far cheaper to prevent disease and enhance efficient productivity than to treat disease outbreaks after they occur," says Wade L. Kadel, DVM, director of the Breathitt Veterinary Center, Hopkinsville, Ky. "And veterinary consultants can make maximal use of a variety of resources available to them — such as diagnostic labs — to prevent problems before they happen."


Veterinarians provide specialized diagnostic expertise, which can be an essential first step in addressing production problems. For example, in many cases, a thorough post-mortem examination is the only way to accurately identify the cause of an animal's death. Post-mortem findings may be instrumental in preventing disease outbreaks

and other problems that directly and severely affect the producer's bottom line.

Producers have access to free consulting services provided by feed companies, computer recordkeeping companies, and equipment suppliers. But while these sources may be knowledgeable in individual aspects of production, the veterinarian offers expertise with a broader perspective.

"Veterinarians see the big picture. Their frame of reference begins with a concern for animal health," says Dr. Kadel. "In an effort to reduce expenses, some producers are using free services provided by feed companies, vaccine suppliers, and non-resident experts, and they are purchasing medications and biologics from sources other than the local veterinarian. It is possible — even probable — that these efforts at reducing expenses and preventing disease have resulted in the use of expensive vaccines and feed additives not needed for specific operations."

Large livestock production units routinely employ herd health programs and goal-oriented management techniques.



Small family farm units can also benefit from these programs with the advice of local veterinary consultants.

"Many family farm operators have learned that the expense for routine scheduled visits by the local veterinarian is a cost saving factor, and if producers continue to routinely use the services of the local veterinarian, he will always be there to help during emergency situations," says Dr. Kadel.

The veterinarians' role as a consultant to producers develops over time. Producers may initially contact the local veterinarian to diagnose diseased animals, but the most effective treatment often encompasses more than prescribing medication or administering vaccines.

"Environmental problems, nutrition and a variety of other factors can combine to initiate disease outbreaks and other problems in productivity," says Buddy Ray, a vet consultant in Mayfield, Ky. "In time, producers call on the veterinarian before there is a disease problem — just to inspect the facilities and offer advice on how the producer can do better."

"The shift from being a technical expert to becoming a true consultant is a mind set, a frame of reference," says Chuck E. Goll, president, Executive Dynamics, Renton, Wash. "Consultants must adopt a philosophy of asking questions. While veterinarians are taught in school to have all the right answers, what makes them successful consultants is knowing how to ask the right questions."

Strong communications skills combined with knowledge about factors affecting production efficiency are key to successful veterinary consulting. University programs are emphasizing these areas. Today's veterinary student focusing on production medicine also will have classes in nutrition, genetics, environment management and computer recordkeeping and analysis.

These classes equip veterinarians to address livestock producers' key concerns. "The first thing the veterinarian needs to do when he visits a livestock operation is to find out what the producer's goals are — what he is trying to achieve — and then help him to get it," Goll says.