

# VETERINARY CALL

by Bob Larson, Kansas State University

## Health Considerations When Marketing Seedstock Cattle

*There's more to selling cattle than just phenotype and genotype.*

While genetic potential is likely the primary focus when marketing seedstock cattle, health should also be a significant consideration. Health information that may be of value to seedstock customers includes the health management plan for the herd, as well as test results for disease agents the customer is trying to exclude from their operation.

Providing documentation that outlines which vaccinations are used for specific age categories of cattle and the current deworming and fly control strategies is valuable to many seedstock customers. Providing a clear explanation of the diagnostic screening tests used and how strategies help to protect customers' herds adds important information when selecting breeding animals.

In my opinion, the two most important diagnostic tests to consider when selling or purchasing replacement cattle are the tests for BVD (bovine viral diarrhea) and trichomoniasis. Long-term carriers for both are relatively rare, and accurate testing strategies can be used. Young calves are the best population to test for the BVD virus, and non-virgin bulls are the most important population to test for being a carrier for trichomoniasis.

Whether or not cattle persistently infected with a specific disease-causing agent can be accurately identified with a diagnostic test is a critical consideration. There are a number of tests that accurately identify cattle persistently infected with BVD virus. Also, although a single negative test for trichomoniasis cannot ensure a bull is not a carrier, three properly collected samples taken at weekly intervals that return a negative result are fairly strong evidence.

A number of other diseases with long-term carriers have fairly accurate tests, including anaplasmosis, neosporosis and bovine leukosis. Diseases with less accurate tests include strawberry foot rot and Johne's disease (particularly for early stages of the diseases). Diagnostic testing of young replacement animals is not a common control strategy for these.

Although fairly accurate tests are available for anaplasmosis, neosporosis and bovine leukosis, the carriers for these agents are common in many parts of the country, so it isn't a useful disease-control strategy to exclude test-positive replacements for herds already infected. In order for testing replacements to be an

effective intervention, the disease agent must be absent from the receiving herd. In addition, because the likelihood the receiving herd is free of the disease agent may be different in different parts of the country, the value of disease carriers and non-carriers can be different between potential customers.

The blood-borne parasite that causes anaplasmosis is a good example of a disease agent common in some areas and rare in other areas. If a producer is not certain if their herd already has anaplasmosis carriers, a reasonable suggestion is to test a representative sample of the herd. If a herd does not currently have carrier animals, all replacements (bulls and females) coming from areas where anaplasmosis is common should be tested prior to contact with the herd.

There are many aspects to marketing seedstock cattle. Veterinarians can play a role communicating the specific disease control and prevention strategies employed on your ranch. **AJ**

*Editor's note: Robert L. Larson is a professor of production medicine and executive director of Veterinary Medicine Continuing Education at Kansas State University.*

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