

TRICH: The Rest of the Story

by **Becky Mills**

In an August *Angus Journal* article (“Trich Is No Treat,” page 55), the prescription for controlling trichomoniasis (trich) included vaccinating cows and testing bulls, then culling infected bulls. Veterinarian and Angus breeder Don Crum agrees that is good advice. But, after battling trich for 20 years, the Alturas, Calif., practitioner says he has come up with another weapon.

“My recommendation is to vaccinate the cows *and* the bulls,” Crum says. Although pharmaceutical companies haven’t run long-term vaccination trials on bulls, Crum tried it on his own — a move made of necessity.

“We have a high incidence of trich in this area,” he says, explaining that it is not unusual to find herds with 50% of the cows open and 50% of the bulls infected with the reproductive disease.

He says a profile of the ranches in his area — northeastern California, Nevada and Oregon — explains the high infection rate.

“Eighty percent of our land is public land. The cattle mix and run on the range together. There is a lot of exposure,” he points out.

Crum says his clients commonly ship cattle back and forth between summer and winter pastures. The cattle mix with different herds at each location, making the spread of disease all the more likely. He also says the size of the herds — anywhere from 200 to 3,000 head — magnifies the control problem.

“You can’t get ranchers in this area to keep fences up,” he adds.

It takes two

Bulls are the guilty party when it comes to spreading trich. They carry the infection in their prepuce and sheath. Their fondness

for roaming, especially if there is a cow in heat on a neighboring ranch, compounds the problem.

However, the disease does its economic dirty work in the cows. Infected cows usually abort in the first 30-70 days of pregnancy, before you even realize they are pregnant. If it happens early enough in the breeding season, they might breed back. If not, your first clue may be at pregnancy-checking time when more females than normal show up open.

Although Crum found vaccinating the cows was effective, he felt he had to go a step further to prevent reintroduction of the disease. By vaccinating bulls, he says, “Now, maybe if my bull gets over the fence and gets with infected cows, he won’t bring it back with him.”

He recommends starting the vaccination program with new bulls. Vaccinate them twice, two to six weeks before the breeding season, then every six months after that.

“In our practice, we find more trich-positive bulls in the 2- and 3-year-old bulls than in older bulls. The young bulls are the more active breeders and have less immunity than the older bulls,” he explains. “Therefore, we vaccinate all bulls and hope to keep them in the herd longer.”

Crum recommends a similar vaccination program for females. Vaccinate replacement heifers twice, two to four weeks before the breeding season, then give them and the mature cows already on a vaccination program a yearly booster before the breeding season. If you can’t vaccinate females right before the breeding season or

if you have to mix spring- and fall-calving herds, Crum recommends vaccinating them twice a year, too.

He says a dose of vaccine normally costs approximately \$2.60 but can range from \$2.45 to \$3/dose.

Test, retest

Testing bulls is also a key part of Crum’s control program. He says he goes through a thousand test kits a year. During the test, which costs approximately \$15-\$25/bull, the veterinarian runs a pipette into the back part of the prepuce. Then he cultures the sample in-house.

Crum recommends testing bulls 10 days to two weeks after the breeding season. He says the test is about 85% accurate, so if he finds any positive bulls, he tests all the bulls again. If he finds any more positives that time, he tests yet again.

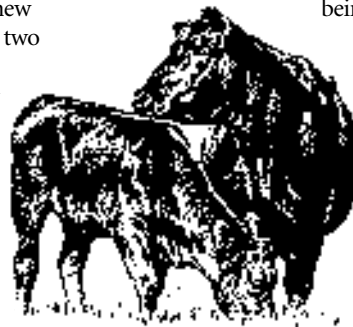
“If the bulls are clean and you have a good pregnancy rate, I’d stop after one test,” he says. “The bulls get a little tired of being worked, but build good facilities and go on.”

He says producers often test right before the breeding season, but if a bull is infected, they face the chore of finding a replacement at the last minute.

He recommends culling infected bulls, then keeping fences in good repair so the bulls can’t commingle with cattle from other herds. If they do happen to escape, then they should be tested again.

Success story

Crum’s program has helped Hagge Ranch Inc. come back from their battle with trich. “We got it in our herd five years ago,” says Nancy Hagge, who ranches with her husband, Willy, and brother-in-law,



John. “We preg-check every fall and usually get around 95% bred. That fall, only 62% were bred up.”

Hagge says they were vaccinating with a vibriosis (vibrio)-leptospirosis (lepto) combination, but it didn’t include trich. After being clean for several years, they had stopped testing the bulls in the 250-cow commercial herd for trich. That changed after the dismal pregnancy check.

“We trich-tested the bulls and sold the positive ones for slaughter,” she says.

Now they test the bulls for trich annually. “If they get in with the neighbor’s cows, we test them again,” she states.

They also added trich vaccine to the vibrio-lepto combination and started vaccinating the bulls and the cows two to three times a year.

“There is not a lot of data on vaccinating bulls, but it helped us,” Hagge reports.

One thing they won’t do again is try to breed the open cows if they have another outbreak. “We kept the younger cows and bred them to calve in the fall,” she recalls. “We put the vaccine in them, and still only half bred back.”

Crum isn’t surprised. “Trich builds a lot of infection in cows. There is inflammation and thickening of the cervix and uterus,” he

says. “Sometimes they won’t breed back the second year, either.”

Hagge says they have their Charolais-Angus-Hereford cows back on track, and the majority are calving between February and April.

“Last year they pregged up really good,” she says. “But it has taken us almost five years to get back to this point.”

