

# VETERINARY CALL



by Bob Larson, Kansas State University

## Seminal Vesiculitis

*A common and frustrating problem of bulls that can be identified when a veterinarian does a breeding soundness examination is seminal vesiculitis (or inflammation of the vesicular glands). These glands secrete fluid that acts to transport sperm when a bull breeds a cow in heat. Most bulls with vesiculitis do not show any signs of sickness or discomfort.*

The semen of these bulls may appear normal or have a visible brownish or blood-tinged discoloration. When semen from bulls with vesiculitis is examined under a microscope, the veterinarian will find white blood cells mixed with the sperm cells. Reduced semen quality in affected bulls is just one symptom. If sperm cells appear abnormal when examined under a microscope (in addition to white blood cells in the sample) the bull has problems in other areas of the reproductive tract as well (such as testicles or epididymis).

Seminal vesiculitis is primarily found in two different age populations, young bulls near puberty and older bulls. Although the exact cause of vesiculitis is unknown, it has been shown that young bulls housed in group confinement and fed high energy diets are at greater risk for the disease compared to bulls reared in a range environment.

### Recovery and treatment

Many young bulls with vesiculitis will recover after several weeks or months whether or not they

are treated with antibiotics — the problem is that at the time of diagnosis and treatment, it is impossible to determine whether or not a particular bull will recover. Older bulls with vesiculitis are not likely to clear the infection even with aggressive antibiotic therapy. And, while surgical removal of the affected vesicular glands is sometimes attempted in valuable older bulls, the likelihood of the bull becoming a successful breeder again is poor.

When the diagnosis is made, the producer and veterinarian need to discuss available treatment options and the expected time for a best-case outcome. This ensures a producer will have enough time to find sound bulls for the breeding season. Because we don't fully understand the causes of seminal vesiculitis, it is difficult to plan a prevention strategy.

I usually advise that the overall health and management of young bulls be addressed when a high percentage are diagnosed with vesiculitis. Young bulls should be fed a diet promoting adequate but not excessive weight gain and housed in an area free from mud

with protection from temperature extremes. They should have plenty of room to exercise and adequate bunk space and water access. The bulls should be vaccinated against common viral and bacterial diseases and receive routine internal and external parasite control.

Bulls diagnosed with vesiculitis should be examined one or more times over the following weeks to determine if the condition is improving, remaining stable or deteriorating. Bulls not showing improvement over several weeks are less likely to be highly fertile in a rapidly approaching breeding season.

email: [rlarson@vet.k-state.edu](mailto:rlarson@vet.k-state.edu)