Prebreeding Vaccinations

If ever there was a year to use prebreeding vaccinations, 2013 is likely to be it. Stressed cattle weakened by heat, drought and poor nutrition in 2012 face a heightened threat of infectious reproductive disease, according to Jerry Woodruff, professional services veterinarian with Boehringer Ingelheim Vetmedica Inc.

With all those additional challenges, getting on track with a strong vaccination program can help protect the health of the herd and reduce the potential for lost revenue from open cows in 2013.

Vaccinations can help protect the health of the herd and of your bottom line.

"The animals have certainly suffered from some heat stress and drought stress this past year, and under those sorts of conditions, the animals' immune systems are compromised, leading them to be more vulnerable to infectious reproductive diseases," Woodruff explains. "Boosting immunity with a strong vaccination program including Express® FP becomes a very critical element to include in the herd health program."

Many key reproductive diseases affect cows (and in some cases, the fetus) early in gestation. Because of that, it's important to vaccinate prebreeding to help protect against viral pathogens like bovine viral diarrhea (BVD) and infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR), bacterial diseases like vibriosis and leptospirosis, and protozoal diseases like trichomoniasis.

Critical factors for vaccination success

A cow's ability to mount an immune response to disease challenges goes beyond simply administering a vaccine. Woodruff encourages producers to consider nutrition, including energy, protein and trace-mineral supplementation. He also emphasizes correct timing of prebreeding vaccinations to maximize protection before disease challenges occur.

"For a lot of those diseases, the animals are very vulnerable during the early part of the gestation period, so it's very important for them to have protection prior to exposure to the bull," he says. "That's why the prebreeding vaccination — say, 30 to 60 days before bull turnout — is the ideal time to get the protection into those cows prior to when they are likely to see exposure."

While producers can vaccinate spring-calving cows in the fall at preg-check time, Woodruff says they miss the critical time to protect the herd.

"Persistently infected (PI) BVD calves are formed early in the pregnancy. The venereal diseases — vibrio, trichomoniasis — those are diseases you want protection against approximately 30 days ahead of the breeding season. By vaccinating at preg-check time, you've lost some of the importance and value of those vaccinations because the time when exposure happens has already passed," Woodruff says.

Seeing the return

Vaccination is just one part of getting cows bred on the first heat cycle, but it has a big impact. In years like this, avoiding disease challenges that could affect reproductive efficiency should be high-priority.

"The earlier the cows are bred and calve, the more pounds they will have to sell," he explains. "It's simple math that if a cow calves 21 days earlier than her herdmate, 21 days multiplied by a 1.75- or even 2-pound-a-day gain on those calves can equal a large sum of pounds, which then corresponds to a bigger value when producers sell those calves."

Putting a prebreeding vaccination protocol in place that utilizes modified-live virus (MLV) vaccines that have a fetal-protection label claim, like the Express FP vaccine family, can help protect the cow and her fetus throughout pregnancy.

Woodruff recommends talking to your veterinarian about establishing a prebreeding vaccination protocol.

Editor's Note: *This article is adapted from a news release from Boehringer Ingelheim Vetmedica Inc.*