



Vet Call

► by **Bob Larson**, Kansas State University

Being a good neighbor from a cattle health standpoint

Being a good neighbor and having good neighbors are important considerations when planning your overall herd health strategy. The impact neighboring cattle can have on the health of your herd depends on the level of contact, the specific disease in question and the timing of contact between herds. Nearby herds that can affect your herd's health can range from herds commingled with yours for grazing purposes to herds with fenceline contact to herds with no direct contact with your cattle but within a distance that escaped cattle, wildlife, humans, and air- and water-flow could move disease-causing agents between herds.

For most disease risks, more frequent and long-lasting exposure between herds carries greater risk than very occasional or short-term contact. However, even short-term contact between herds can lead to serious health problems if the exposure occurs during a time in pregnancy when either the dam or fetus is particularly vulnerable, or at an age or time of year when a particular disease causes the most problems.

Herd vulnerability

Viruses, bacteria and other microorganisms can cause disease when the dose of disease-causing agents overwhelms the ability of cattle to fight them. Cattle herds don't build good immunity to some diseases, either because of certain characteristics of the germs themselves or because some disease-causing germs are rarely found in herds and, thus, herds are unlikely to build long-term immunity against them.

In these situations, even small exposure may lead to many cattle becoming sick, aborting or other negative consequences. Contact between herds increases risk.

In contrast, some disease-causing agents are so common in cattle populations it is unlikely any one herd is completely free of the organism. In this case, contact between herds does not greatly increase the risk of many common diseases.

Exposure increases risk

Most herds do not have cattle shedding the germs that cause trichomoniasis (trich) or bovine viral diarrhea (BVD). Therefore, most herds are susceptible to major disease problems if exposed to cattle that carry these germs. One of the common ways to expose a herd to these diseases is by contact with neighboring herds.

Other diseases, such as anaplasmosis, are common in many parts of the country but rare in other parts. Therefore, contact with

neighboring herds can increase the risk for these diseases in some areas but not in others. Diseases such as bovine leukosis virus (BLV), neosporosis, and agents that cause bovine respiratory disease (BRD) and calf scours are so common that contact between herds would rarely increase the disease risk in herds that are already infected.

Strategy is key

It is important to work with your veterinarian to devise an appropriate plan to keep your herd from being exposed to cattle that carry trich or BVD organisms. You should also work with your veterinarian to implement a strategy to limit the negative effects of BRD, calf scours and other common diseases even though you will not be able to eliminate or keep the germs associated with these diseases from your herd.

A few diseases can be transmitted even after cattle have died. Proper carcass disposal to prevent direct contact with other cattle, spread of organisms by scavengers such as coyotes and birds, and contamination of water or soil that other animals may contact is necessary to keep nearby cattle safe. Your veterinarian, extension agent or local



regulatory contacts can provide you with information about proper carcass disposal.

Control pests

Being a good neighbor also means that you control flies, as well as toxic plants and weeds that can move from one cattle operation to another. In many situations, pest control can only be effective if all the agriculture operations in the area implement control measures; and all operations benefit from the efforts of others in the area.

Pesticides and other chemicals intended for use on plants and animals can be important weapons to control disease and improve animal health, but they also pose a toxic risk if not applied or disposed of properly. Everyone using farm chemicals should be properly trained in how to apply chemicals to animals, plants and premises. They should also be trained in how chemicals should be stored so animals are not accidentally exposed to concentrated,

toxic doses, and in how to safely dispose of any residues and empty containers.

In summary, being a good neighbor from an animal health perspective involves having good pasture management, animal husbandry and animal health skills. Specifically, good neighbors use effective pest control, maintain good fences to limit unintended cross-fence exposure, and work with a veterinarian to implement vaccination and biosecurity plans for diseases that can move from one herd to another to provide protection to your own herd and to decrease disease risk for other herds in the area.

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