



Vet Call

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

Health considerations when marketing cattle

Seedstock producers strive to market desirable genetics to their customers through the bulls and heifers they sell, while commercial cattle producers market calves or yearlings with growth potential to their customers. While health may not be the primary thought when marketing cattle, it should be a significant consideration.

Keep good records

Important records that can be used when marketing cattle document all the veterinary services utilized in the herd's health program. These will include disease prevention efforts such as use of screening tests and quarantine of new arrivals, vaccination of all ages of cattle on the ranch, as well as deworming and fly-control strategies. Health records should also include all disease treatment protocols and results of production evaluations such as breeding soundness examination (sometimes referred to as a BSE) of bulls, and pregnancy check of cows.

For seedstock producers, using diagnostic tests to identify cattle that are long-term carriers to particular disease-causing agents prior to sale is an important part of some disease control and marketing plans. In order for a strategy to test all seedstock cattle marketed as herd replacements to be an effective and valuable health and marketing plan, the disease agent must be absent from the receiving herd and an accurate test must be available. In addition, because the likelihood that the receiving herd is free of the disease agent may be different in different parts of the country, the value of both disease carriers and non-carriers can be very different between different potential customers.

Be aware of pathogens

Many viruses, bacteria and parasites that commonly cause disease in cattle are present in many or even most beef cattle herds and serious disease outbreaks do not occur because of new exposure to these disease agents, but because environmental stress or other challenges decrease the animals' ability to fight off the normal exposure. Examples of disease-causing agents that fit this category

include most agents associated with calf scours, bovine respiratory disease, lump jaw, and foot rot. Even if a seedstock producer wanted to market cattle that were free of the types of disease-causing agents, it would not be possible.

Other disease-causing agents are uncommon or absent in some parts of the country and a strategy to only purchase test-negative replacements is recommended for herds known to be free of the agent. However, these same disease-causing agents may be very common in other parts of the country, and testing replacements with the idea to exclude positive cattle is not likely to improve the health of the receiving herd. The blood-borne parasite that causes anaplasmosis is a good example of a disease agent

that is common in some areas and rare in other areas. If a producer is not certain if his or her herd has carrier animals for disease agents that cause anaplasmosis, a reasonable suggestion is to test a representative sample of the herd (or possibly cull animals) to estimate the current number of carrier animals. If a herd does not currently have carrier animals and the producer desires that the herd remain free of the infectious agent, all replacements (bulls and females) should be tested prior to contact with the herd.

Test for carriers

The final consideration for excluding replacement animals that test positive as long-term carriers for disease agents is whether or not an accurate test is available. For example, there are a number of good tests to identify cattle persistently infected with bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD) virus. Additionally, although a single negative test for trichomoniasis cannot ensure that a bull is not a carrier, three properly collected

samples taken at weekly intervals that return a negative result is fairly strong evidence for a bull to not be a carrier.

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).

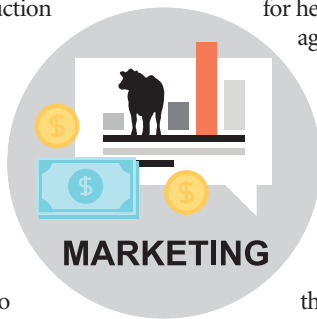
In my opinion, the two most important infectious diseases to consider when selling or purchasing replacement cattle are BVD and trichomoniasis. Long-term carriers for both of these diseases are relatively rare, and accurate testing strategies can be used. Young calves are the best population to test for being persistently infected with BVD virus, and non-virgin bulls are the most important population to test for being a carrier for trichomoniasis.

Although fairly accurate tests are available for anaplasmosis, neosporosis and bovine leukosis, because the carriers for these agents are common in many parts of the country and economically important disease outbreaks only occasionally occur, the best replacement testing strategy will vary between ranches and must be carefully considered by the producer and herd veterinarian. Buying replacements from herds that are at low risk for strawberry foot rot and Johne's is preferable to relying on testing of herd additions because accurate tests are lacking.

There are many aspects to a successful cattle marketing plan. Veterinarians can play a number of important roles to ensure that you have a healthy herd and that you can communicate that fact to your customers. Encourage your customers and their veterinarians to talk to your veterinarian about the specific disease prevention and treatment strategies employed on your ranch. Many times, veterinarian-to-veterinarian conversations can be very helpful to make sure that both the seller and buyer are satisfied with the transaction.

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