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Bull Buying Season

Why BVD Testing is an Important Part of Purchasing a New Bull

The BVD Education Project - a BVD continuing education brief by Dr. Bill Hessman, DVM

The Breeding Soundness Exams (BSE) is a cornerstone evaluation of a bull's potential reproductive performance. All bulls should have a BSE completed prior to the breeding season. Less than adequate fertility of the bull will lead to decreased reproductive performance of the herd. While it is wise to evaluate fertility of the herd bull, an often overlooked assessment is testing for Bovine Viral Diarrhea Virus –Persistent Infections (BVDV-PI).

Bovine viral diarrhea virus (BVDV) is one of the most costly viral diseases in cattle. Introduction of BVDV into a herd can have huge economic impacts. The most common reservoir for BVDV infection is contact with a persistently infected (PI) animal. PI animals are produced only during gestation and surviving animals produce and shed large quantities of the virus lifelong. Most PI animals will die prior to reaching a mature age, but a small portion can survive to maturity and enter the breeding herd.

While many producers may have evaluated their female population for evidence of PI's, the herd bulls are often overlooked. It should become standard procedure during a bull's BSE to assess BVDV-PI status as well. The procedure is simple and testing is economical. During the BSE take an ear notch sample and have it tested for BVD-PI. Once an animal is tested negative they remain negative and no further testing is required. Testing for BVDV-PI is a once in a lifetime occurrence and cost.

Introduction of a PI bull into the herd generally appears as a lack of conception but can also cause abortions, congenital defects and production of PI calves. Producers can also see increased perinatal death, increased sickness in the calf crop, increased mortality and reduced weaning weights. Vaccination status of the herd and any newly purchased bull should also be evaluated. Introduction of a PI bull can also have health effects on the adult population as well, especially in herds that are not vaccinated properly.

While a BSE can confirm the breeding soundness of a bull, its fertility can be greatly impacted if the animal is BVDV-PI and can have devastating consequences to the entire herd. Testing for PI status in conjunction with the bulls BSE should become a routine procedure in breeding herds.

The BVD Education Project - is a producer focused series of articles by Dr. Bill Hessman, DVM, Sublette Kansas, aimed at providing cattlemen with information that will allow them to protect their herds from the impact of Bovine Viral Diarrhea Virus (BVDV or BVD) and persistent infection (BVD-PI).