Bovine Brucellosis Risks

AWARENESS OF BRUCELLOSIS – WHAT SHOULD YOU KNOW?

Brucellosis is a chronic disease that causes abortions and reduced fertility in cattle that is caused by Brucella abortus bacteria. It is mainly spread between heads through the introduction of infected cattle and within heads when infected cattle abort or give birth. Millions of bacteria are released into the environment during the birthing process. Cattle are curious by nature and will sniff and lick an aborted fetus or afterbirth. Brucella organisms then enter the animal through the mucous membranes of the mouth, nose and eyes. The incubation period is highly variable, ranging from a few weeks up to many months before an infected animal test positive.

This makes testing and removing positive animals a challenge. Once an animal is infected, there is no treatment to effectively cure the disease – the animal should be slaughtered to remove it as a source of infection to healthy animals.

**BUYING OR KEEPING HEIFERS BORN FROM INFECTED COWS**

- May be latently infected – often only start feeling positive once she has calved/aborted
- Milliliter of bacteria are then spread within the herd and in the environment
- Avoid

**INFECTED HERD**

- If your herd is infected, cooperate with the state veterinarian to eradicate the disease
- Once your herd is cleared of brucellosis, keep it clean – prevention is better than cure
- Only buy in clean, tested animals from herds of a known negative brucellosis status

**VACCINATION** ($19 or RB51)

- Routinely used for standard $19 dose in heifers four to eight months of age, not older ($851 may also be used)
- RB51 may also be used in adult cows in high-risk circumstances

**State veterinarian needs to approve RB51 use after having discussed the advantages and disadvantages with the owner and getting his/her to sign indemnity form.**

- Ideally, $19 vaccinated animals should be permanently marked
- RB51 does not interfere with serological testing when used in cow animals.

**BUYERS**

- Be well informed – the disease can devastate your existing herd
- Brucellosis cannot be seen; the animals look healthy
- Insist on buying animals from a herd with a known negative status – ask for proof
- Insist on buying vaccinated animals – ask for proof

**ZOOONOSIS**

- Brucellosis is dangerous to your health!
- Brucellosis may be transmitted to humans mainly through the consumption of infected unpasteurised milk or dairy products, and through the handling of aborted fetuses, afterbirths and excretions
- It is known as undulant fever and symptoms tend to be non-specific and flu-like
- Headache, muscle pain, fever, cold sweats and general malaise. There is no treatment available, but the disease may persist despite treatment.

**MAINTENANCE PROGRAMME**

Annual serological or 12 month monthly MBT in dairy herd third negative test (all owners’ expenses)

(Where the heifer calves from infected dams are slaughtered, the herd can be given CF (confirmed free) status).

**RECOMMENDATION**

- Test your herd regularly and keep your herd safe!
- If you do not know the current status of your herd, contact your local state veterinarian for advice
- You are the key factor in preventing brucellosis.

**REFERENCES**

- Bovine Brucellosis Import Manual – 5 December 2013
- Bovine Brucellosis Scheme (R. of J) under the Animal Diseases Act, Act 35 of 1984
- Credit to Dr Sewellyn Davey’s inputs

**CONCLUSION**

- Prevalence of brucellosis is a national asset – not an estate
- You are the key factor in preventing brucellosis.

Credit to Dr Sewellyn Davey’s inputs