

# Brucellosis - Care Is Still The Watchword

Not only is brucellosis still with us but the number of infected cattle herds is increasing, according to Dr. Paul Becton, director of the National Brucellosis Eradication Program for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). Some increases are in areas considered relatively free of infection, so there's ample reason for taking precautions wherever you are.

"You should make every effort to learn the brucellosis status of the herds from which replacement animals originate," says Dr. Becton, "and buy only from herds known to be clean! When buying replacements for your breeding herds, you should also insist that they be tested and found free of disease before allowing them to come onto your farm."

Dr. Becton cautions, however, a single negative test is no guarantee of freedom from brucellosis, because the disease has a long and variable incubation period. "Some animals exposed to brucellosis may show no reaction to a blood test one day, only to react to a test 30 to 60 days later," he observes.

The veterinarian

recommends isolating new replacements from the established breeding herd and testing them again 30 to 60 days after purchase. Young females for feeding should also be retested or else they should remain isolated from the breeding herd as long as they're on the farm or ranch.

What about vaccinating animals for brucellosis? "No vaccine is perfect," notes Dr. Becton, "and Strain 19 is no exception. Under usual field conditions, it's quite serviceable - protecting about 65 percent of the animals vaccinated. This percentage can be drastically reduced, however, under conditions of massive exposure."

"I feel every dairyman must weigh the advantages of vaccination in his own herd, with an eye toward future plans as well as present conditions. Is he maintaining essentially a 'closed herd' or does he buy and sell frequently? Does the farm border a strictly commercial herd that purchases additions for various parts of the country? Also, does he produce animals that are sold as replacements to high risk areas or states that require vaccination?"

"Should a dairyman

decide to pursue a vaccination program, heifers should be vaccinated as soon as possible after three months of age - preferably in the three to six months age range. This will provide adequate protection and will almost completely eliminate the problem of vaccine interference with blood tests."

Such interference has been a serious problem in the past - for herd owners, their veterinarians and regulatory people. This happens because vaccine produces the same antibody in the blood as the one produced by actual infection. So when the animals are later blood-tested, it may not be possible to distinguish between reaction caused by true infection and reaction caused by the vaccine. This problem is most common in animals vaccinated after six months of age.

Many cattlemen know brucellosis as Bangs or contagious abortion. It's a chronic bacterial disease which persists for long periods in infected animals. When brucellosis gains entry into a herd of susceptible females, large numbers of abortions often result. The calf crop may be reduced by 15 to 40 percent. Milk production in infected dairy

herds may be reduced by as much as 20 percent.

Infected cows shed germs of the disease when aborting... germs which are likely to be picked up by other cows. A cow that aborts due to brucellosis may later give birth to normal calves but still shed the germs whenever she gives birth. Also, about one out of five cows will not rebreed after an abortion caused by brucellosis.

Dr. Becton says one thing farmers can do to control the disease is to consult a veterinarian whenever a cow has an abortion or still birth, to find if brucellosis is the cause.

Besides infecting cattle and other livestock, brucellosis was once a significant human health problem. In humans, the disease is called undulant

fever and causes persistent symptoms somewhat resembling influenza.

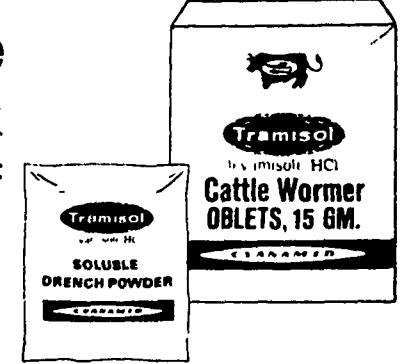
As a result of efforts to eradicate brucellosis from livestock, the incidence in humans has been dramatically reduced. Presently, nearly all cases

are occupation-associated - with farmers, veterinarians, and packing plant workers being among the hardest hit due to their coming into direct contact with infected animals.

"You should take the [Continued on Page 23]

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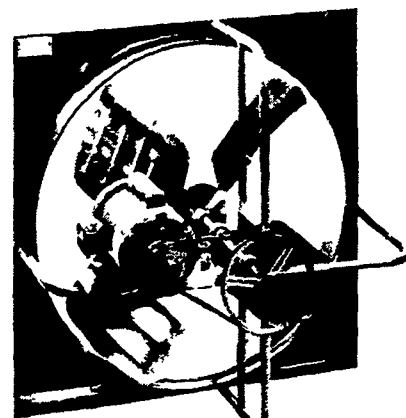
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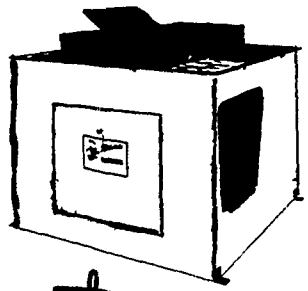
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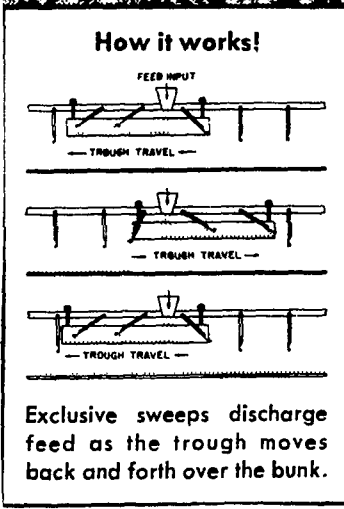
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