

Ask the VMD



Leon Riegel Tim Trayer Edgar Sheaffer

Help keep my heifer from coffin.

A reader asks:

One of our heifers has developed a hacking cough. She coughs when she runs, eats, and is just standing still. But, she doesn't have a runny nose. Could this be worms? Any other thoughts - she eats everything in sight and isn't running fever.

Dr. Trayer comments:

Hacking coughs can be a real problem in cattle.

Since the age of the animal was not given, I will assume that the heifer was older than six months.

In this case, it will be hard to differentiate whether the cough is being set up by worms or a young calf pneumonia which has left residual damage to the lung tissue. This damage will create a situation where the animal does not have the full

lung capacity that it would normally have.

Concerning worms, there are only two species that could possibly be giving the heifer the hacking cough.

The ascarid, or round worm (*Toxocara vitulorum*) migrates through the intestine, liver, and lungs is usually seen in animals less than six months of age.

The other worm that can be an adult-type lung parasite is *Dictyocaulus viviparus*, commonly called the lung worm. This worm is primarily a problem in high rainfall areas with moderate temperatures, subtropical climates. In Pennsylvania, there is not a high level of diagnoses of lung worm infestations. But, it is a possibility especially when there are high moisture conditions with a high density of animals where

there would be a continual build-up of the parasite.

However, where considering the coughing heifer, I have to keep in mind all worms because their presence in the animal lowers her natural resistance and depletes her body protein.

Dairymen and livestock owners need to ask their veterinarians whether they need to switch worming medicines in their parasite control program.

With reports coming from Ohio indicating increased resistance of different species of worms to thiabendazole, I recommend going to the levamisole products. There has been no research to date documenting any resistance to this group of wormers.

The worming program in most cattle operations needs

to be reviewed. I recommend initiating it earlier in the life of heifers and bulls, starting with a levamisole product at six to eight weeks, reworming when the animal goes to pasture, and again after being on pasture for three to six weeks.

Most worm damage to young stock occurs soon after exposure to a contaminated pasture or feed lot area. If a dairyman or livestock breeder only has a limited amount of dollars to invest into a worming, or anthelmintic, program, it should be spent on the younger animal versus spending it on the mature cow.

There is still too much question in the research data whether a breeder gains anything by worming the adult animal, where there will be definite gains when the younger animals are treated. Worming young cattle is generally overlooked due to lack of handling facilities, but it should be looked into more carefully by producers and initiated.

If you believe you do have a lung worm infestation in the herd the only way to get a positive diagnosis is by postmortem findings - submitting an animal to the state diagnostic laboratory and having the results sent to your veterinarian for interpretation.

In case of positive test results for lung worm, the only wormer that has been proven effective is the levamisole group of wormers, and their efficacy in preventing the disease is questionable.

I don't consider a hacking

cough to always be worms. However, in this situation, where the heifers is said to be eating everything in sight, there may be a chronic worm problem that may be predisposing her to a cough and lung problems.

If it is worms, the cough is the result of the migration of the parasite up the throat, causing a tickling effect. The animal then hacks, trying to cough up the migrating parasite.

Keep in mind, this is not a common diagnosis in central Pennsylvania.

I am more concerned with the animal that had pneumonia at a young age, recovered but was left with scar tissue in the lungs. Perhaps there is an old abscess that is causing chronic irritation. And when the heifer exercises, she over exceeds her ability to ventilate her lungs and begins to cough.

I have been called out on cases of coughing stock on an observation have found that those cattle that are coughing are the unfortunate ones that somehow managed to hang on after pneumonia. They can look forward to only a moderately productive life.

Before getting hung up on an exotic worm diagnosis, there seems to be a need to take a closer look at the calf raising facilities. Keep records of those calves that had pneumonia, as they mature and enter the milking or breeding herd. Often times, these animals, during the stress of summer heat and high humidity, are the first ones to contract viral pneumonia, go off feed,

and run a high temperature before recovering.

Recently, I have made several diagnoses of fungal infections in herds that have been bedded on corn stalks or fodder. My recommendations are for the young stock not to be exposed to these conditions because of the potential for mold and the abnormal pneumonia that sets up.

Young calves should be bedded on clean straw, and the moisture concentration and air circulation in calf barns and heifer pens controlled, along with ammonia level build-ups.

If you have a question you would like answered by the team from Valley Animal Hospital, send it to Ask the VMD, Box 366, Lititz, Pa. 17543. Questions will be kept anonymous on request.

New farmland map

HARRISBURG — Work on Dauphin County's Important Farmland Map has been completed, announced Joel Myers, District Conservationist, Conservation Soil Service, Dauphin County.

Myers added the map was submitted for printing.

"This map will be a step forward in the land use decision-making processes of Dauphin County," he said.

"One of the most difficult land use decisions we face as a nation is when to allow prime farmland to be converted to other uses. These kinds of decisions must be made on a local basis."

Garden Spot FFA wins regional competition



For the first time in 15 years, the Garden Spot parliamentary procedure team has won the Regional competition. Winning recently, front left are: Glenn Hartz, treasurer; Kevin Devine, president; Darlene Horning, chaplain; and Wanda Weber, secretary. Standing from left are: Larry Martin, student advisor; Brian Martin, reporter; Leonard Snader, sentinel and Glenn Yoder, vice president.

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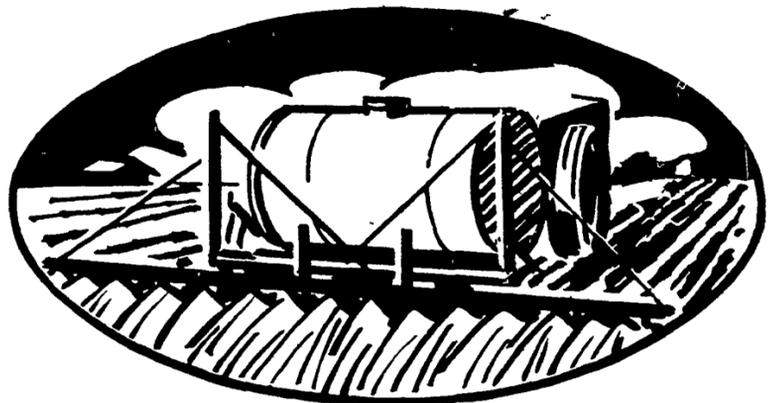


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