

Lack of contractions doesn't cause retained placenta

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — Although experts disagree on what causes cows to retain their placenta (afterbirth) after calving, two University of Maryland researchers feel reasonably sure that they have ruled out one frequently proposed cause of this costly and sometimes deadly dairy farm problem: lack of contractions in the uterus.

Walter F. Williams, a dairy science professor at the university, and Larry Martin, a graduate student, have spent two years examining the relationship between uterine contractions at calving time and the incidence of retained placentas in dairy cows.

The problem is that some dairy cows do not release

their placenta within the normal period of time. The retaining placenta may rot, leading to uterine infection and possible subsequent losses in milk production and fertility, the two researchers say.

Their conclusion - that the lack of contractions is not involved in placenta retention - suggests that scientists should search elsewhere for the cause of the problem, which can affect up to 60 per-cent of a dairy herd (although usually much less) and mean substantial financial losses for farmers.

Martin and Williams will present their findings in a paper entitled "Uterine Motility Measurements in Cows Retaining Fetal

Membranes," to be delivered at the 75th annual meeting of the American Dairy Science Association on June 15 to 18 at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Va.

The retaining placenta problem may interfere with the farmer's goal of a 12-month calving interval, Martin says. In order to maintain a cow on a 12-month schedule, the farmer would have to breed her within 90 days of calving. Retention of fetal membranes - placentas - may delay this.

Although he could not cite an over-all figure, Martin surmised that a dairy farmer could lose on the average of \$1.50 per cow for every day she remains "open" (not pregnant) beyond 90 days of calving. "It's a very considerable loss to the farmer," he said.

"At this stage," Williams says, "there aren't any known causes for retained placentas, although there is a lot of scientific speculation" on the subject. It is this lack of consensus that led to the research project.

The researchers examined the notion that lack of contractions was the cause of retained placentas, that the cow had too few contractions to expel the placenta at the time of calving.

In this experiment, they wanted to find out whether the number and strength of contractions were different between cows that released their placenta and those that did not. Fifteen cows were involved in the research.

To have enough cows with retained placentas to examine at the same time as normal cows, Martin and Williams had to experimentally induce the retention of placentas in half of the animals. To do this, they used a chemical - dexamethasone - which acts to induce calving and results in a high incidence of retained placenta.

First, they checked the effects of dexamethasone on uterine motility (contractions) after calving, then

the difference in uterine motility between cows that retained their placenta and those that did not.

To do that, they measured the number and strength of contractions in each cow at one hour, six hours and at 48 hours after calving.

They found no significant differences in uterine motility between cows that

retained their placenta and those that did not at one hour and at six hours after calving. They did find a significant difference at 48 hours, when those still retaining the placenta were contracting more.

"There is really no effect from contractions on retention of placentas," Martin concluded.

Both scientists noted that their conclusions could affect veterinary practice.

Based on the premise that lack of contraction is a cause of retained placentas, some veterinarians use a drug - oxytocin - to induce contractions in afflicted cows. "This research suggests that their method probably doesn't help," Martin said.

Stewart trial postponed again

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The Wolcott Stewart trial has once again been postponed in order to grant the defense additional time to prepare their case, according to Postal Inspector Donald Warren.

This is the second time the trial was delayed since Stewart was indicted on Tuesday, January 8, 1980 on 14 counts of mail fraud.

The original indictment charged that during a three month period, March, 1978 through June, 1978, Stewart contracted with farmers in Maryland and Pennsylvania to provide their grain to graineries in Baltimore and Salisbury, Md. and McGaheysville and Harrisonburg, Va.

The defendant instructed the graineries to make payment directly to him for the delivered grain. Stewart, upon receiving the payment for the grain, approximately \$182,000, deposited it in his own personal bank account and used the money for his own personal gain.

Stewart was arrested by postal inspectors on January 17 pursuant to a Federal

warrant issued by the District Court, Baltimore, Md.

The original trial date was set for March 5, and was later postponed until May 12.

Now, the trial is slated to begin on June 11, said Inspector Warren.

"Everything is ready for the trial, which will probably last several weeks," he said. "We plan to call several Pennsylvania Farmers' Association members to help out."

"There's a lot of interest in this case, particularly in Pennsylvania, primarily because people there lost money."—SM



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