

Watch for Mastitis in Early Pregnant Cows

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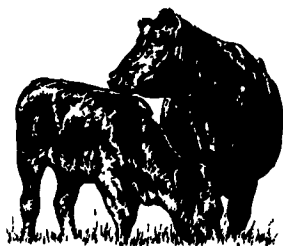
Is occurrence of mastitis related to fertility problems? That's a question I've been asked, and I've always had to tell the individual that I didn't know for sure. There were few published trials available on the topic, and none suggested what kind of problems might be caused.

A study was published in late 1999 by scientists at the College of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Florida that considered this difficult question. They evaluated records from more than 3,000 cows in a high producing herd in Florida. Records were kept concerning which cows had clinical mastitis. The milking personnel examined cows for flakes/clots in the milk and moderate or worse swelling in the udder for classification as clinical mastitis. Pregnancy was determined in the usual rectal exam manner by qualified herd veterinarians between 42 and 49 days after insemination.

Cows with clinical mastitis during the first 45 days of gestation were at 2.7 times greater risk for abortion during the next 90 days than were cows that had no mastitis. No significant association was found between subsequent abortion and season of the year, use of prostaglandin-F-2-alpha to synchronize estrus or lactation number. A small, though still significant, relationship was observed between risk of abortion and insemination based solely on secondary signs of estrus. Cows that conceived to a breeding based only on secondary signs of estrus were at 1.7 times greater risk of abortion.

What are the practical implications? Producers typically can't control when cows get mastitis. Instead, dairy producers should focus on reexamining any pregnant or inseminated cow for pregnancy at 90 days after clinical mastitis is observed. Clever herd managers will develop a system to record which animals have clinical mastitis, and then recheck their breeding records to identify cows that were 45 days pregnant or less, at the time of the mastitis.

Also, cows inseminated solely on secondary signs of estrus should also be rechecked for pregnancy. In that manner, cows at risk for those early abortions will not get lost in the herd and increase costs for the producer.

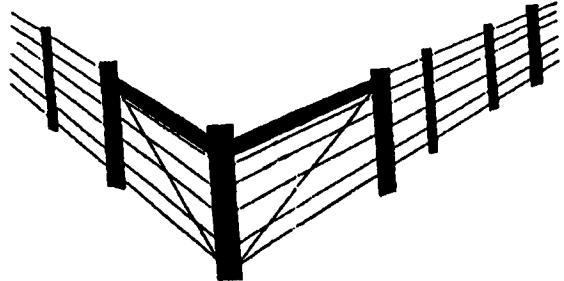


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