

Drought Can Increase Feeder Cattle Respiratory Disease

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Market Staff

NEW HOLLAND (Lancaster Co.) — "Blame it on the weather."

That's the simple answer to county agent Chet Hughes' question regarding the increase in respiratory problems in feedlot cattle here last fall.

"What went wrong?" Hughes asked. Why were there unusually high mortalities and labor intensive treatments reported on sick animals?



Dr. Arlen Mills

The focus of this year's Cattle Feeders' Summer Workshop, coordinated by the Lancaster County office of Penn State Cooperative Extension, was finding the answer.

Hughes and his cooperating sponsors assembled a blue-ribbon panel of experts on feeder calf health to address the respiratory problems of area cattle feeders. "Shipping fever" is the term sometimes given to a runny-nosed, lethargic calf in the auction ring. But it's not that simple. Nor is the treatment. There are

specific organisms at work and specific vaccines and treatments available to prevent or combat them.

"Blame it on the weather." That explanation was offered as part of Dr. Arlen Mills' comments on the respiratory problems. A cooperative extension veterinarian based in Lebanon County, he said there were more feeder calves with respiratory sickness last fall in area feedlots because of the weather.

Mills explained that respiratory problems can go in cycles with the weather. The mother on drought-stricken pastures does not provide good colostrum to the calf. That calf will not be as healthy and able to endure the stresses of weaning, sorting, shipping, loading, unloading — all those factors it goes through until it arrives in the feedlot.

In preparation for the workshop, Mills conducted producer interviews on six Lancaster County farms to evaluate feeder cattle receiving and processing practices. Before coming to Pennsylvania, he had extensive experience working with beef producers as a practicing veterinarian in Ohio for 20 years. He noted that the cattle feeders were very cooperative for his study and he found them very knowledgeable about their cattle.

Mills presented a detailed computer-generated demonstration of his findings, aptly using pictures and charts to evaluate what did or could have gone wrong with so many cattle going on feed last fall.

In his presentation, Mills con-

cluded his talk down to the conditions in three feedlots to illustrate the health problems and what was done to treat the sick calves. Where calves were born and purchased, preconditioning/health treatments, transportation to feedlot, nutrition and feeding facilities — these factors were all included in his discussion.

Mills concluded:

- Calves that had one dose of a killed vaccine or two doses months apart were as apt to need treatment as those calves with no vaccination history.

- Calves which had received modified live vaccination were much less likely to need treatment.

Supplementing Dr. Mills presentation on respiratory problems was Dr. W. Dee Whittier, extension veterinarian for cattle, Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine at Virginia Tech. He has done extensive



Dr. Dee Whittier

research on bovine respiratory diseases and is experienced with the Virginia Quality Assurance feeder calf program. He discussed the influence of health on feeder cattle prices.

Whittier said he has found that the potential health of calves is one of the significant factors that buyers consider when making a decision about how much to pay for calves. They will pay more for vaccinated and preconditioned calves.

After a question about mycoplasma, Whittier proceeded with a detailed answer with the aid of modern technology. He just happened to have a "power point" presentation on mycoplasma on his notebook computer. So he proceeded to "boot up" the notebook and provided up-to-date information on the respiratory illness.

Mycoplasma, Whittier explained, is an infectious organism, classified bacteria, which has come into more scrutiny in the last three or four years in the U.S. He said the illness has been diagnosed as pneumonia and arthritis and a culture needs to be done for a specific diagnosis.

In the wide shipping fever complex, Whittier believes mycoplasma is distinct enough to call it by its own name and it could then be treated more aggressively. He said he has seen an increased incidence of mycoplasma in sale barn calves where there is more exposure than there is on the farm.

Dr. John Lynch, a veterinarian with the Technical Services Group of Intervet, Inc., spoke on the preventive medicine available to provide immunology for calf health problems and avoid the previously discussed illnesses. Lynch has 20 years of experience as a veterinary consultant with beef cow/calf, stocker, and feedlot operations in the U.S. and Mexico.

About 150 cattle feeders turned out for the workshop at Yoder's Restaurant in New Holland in late July.



Dr. John Lynch

Chester Holstein Club Plans Field Day

GAP (Lancaster Co.) — The Chester County Holstein Club has planned a field day Thursday, Aug. 23. The host will be the Amos J. Stoltzfus Family of Gap. The starting time is 10 a.m.

Judging will take place from 10 a.m.-11:30 a.m., followed by a meal of chicken barbecue at noon sponsored by Yost's Catering. Cost for the meal is \$4 for adults, \$2 for 3-10-year-olds, and under three years will be free. Vincent Wagner will be the judge for this year and the speaker will be Alvin Stoltzfus. There also will be a calf drawing for ages 6-16-year-olds.

Directions to the Field Day are as follows: from the intersection of Rt. 10 and Rt. 30, take Rt. 10 north 2 and 1/2 miles. The lane is on the left beside Esch Fencing. From Honeybrook, take Rt. 10 south to Compass. Follow Rt. 10 south. After going through flashing yellow light, the lane is the second one on the right.

For reservations, all any of the following by Aug. 14: Bob Hewitt (610) 495-7927, Dick Hostetter (610) 857-2780, or Glenn Ranck (610) 998-0672. Bring your own lawn chairs. Everyone is welcome.

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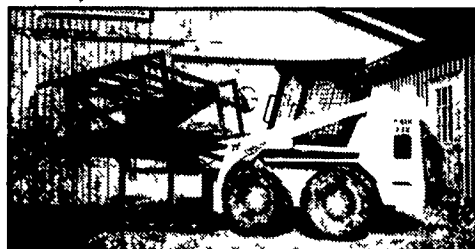
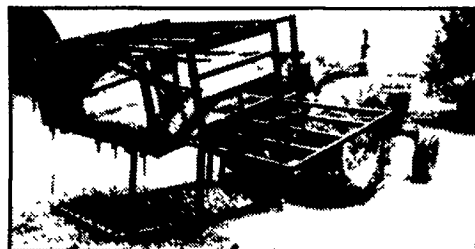
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