OCTOBER 2024 NEWSLETTER

How Long Do Vaccines Last… How Much Should I spend?

Winter dysentery is a disease that is common in small dairy herds. Years ago, some herds would go several years without getting infected, then they would get hammered with severe milk production loss and very bloody diarrhea. I even saw a couple cows bleed to death into their intestine with this disease. It's caused by a corona virus and there is a vaccine for it.

The vaccine and or actual infection protects for maybe 6 months from clinical disease. Some animals' protection is longer, some shorter. Human Covid vaccines are similar, more later. When we talk about protection from clinical disease, there is a lot of variability in the word protection. With vaccinated animals, a lot of animals may get infected. Some don't show they are infected, and there are varying degrees of signs up to a really sick animal. As a herd owner, a mild infection is probably unnoticed, and if one or two cows get infected it is also unnoticed.

Historically, there was some protection from severe disease after a year, but the herd still had a lot of diarrhea. At 3 years there was no immunity left so the animals got very ill. But in large herds the virus doesn't ever leave the farm like it does in a small herd. As different pens of animals are infected, and as animals move, there are always enough new animals with no protection and older animals where protection is waning, that the virus is always on the farm, sort of a constant revaccinating program. There is probably some production loss, probably a cost, but is it anywhere near enough to justify purchasing the vaccine and revaccinating every 6 to 12 months? Probably not even close. If we would have had the vaccine 40 years ago, it would have been a valuable tool. Today, there are too many holes already in dairy cows.

With Covid, in people, the vaccine is similar in duration and effect. Different people have different lengths of protection, with 'protection' being a very fuzzy word. You probably don't get sick in the first 4 to 6 months after vaccination, and that is the same protection with the actual infection.

From then on, the protection is just a reduction of symptoms, with everyone being different in degree of severity.

New Feedlot Will Be Largest in Country

In the U.S. there are less mother beef cows grazing today than any time since the 1950's. Still, a group of beef investors have started constructing a new feedlot in Nebraska called "Blackshirt Feeders." Eventually it will be the largest in the United States with a capacity of 150,000 animals on feed.

The key component of their plan is to feed beef on dairy crosses. Beyond that they are establishing a closed loop where they will contract with Holstein dairies for calves that are bred with semen from Leechman Cattle company, with the semen distributed through Alta or Genex distributors.

The dairy contracts will require identification of every calf with dam and sire genetics so that bulls can be monitored for making the best beef cross possible.

This will produce an entire line of beef bulls specifically designed for the best beef on dairy genetics. The carcasses hanging on the rail will ultimately determine bull genetics which is what we need. I know Sexing Technologies has been aggressively working on bull genetics for dairy beef crossing as well.

I'm guessing genomics will probably play into this as well.

It's easy to get caught up in the sheer size of the operation and get mentally derailed and frustrated, and they will have some advantages. But smaller producers can be early adapters of some of these ideas and make money as well.

We are witnessing a true paradigm shift, a once in a lifetime change to the beef industry where the dairy industry and beef industry can profit with synergies.

It is important that all dairy producers keep current on this issue and look for methods to capitalize for their operation.

Paradigm shifts produce the most profit for early adopters, think of examples from past with storing feed as silage, breeding with artificial insemination or even milk machines.

Deworming Cattle

As fall approaches it's important for producers to take a look at their deworming protocols.

Parasites can be a problem but often the problem is unseen. Maybe your calves weaning weights are down or the gains just aren't what they have been in the past. Or possibly your pregnancy rates are lower.

For dairy animals on concrete, whether youngstock or adults, with limited or no access to dirt, deworming probably is an expense that can be avoided.

If you think you need to deworm, check with your vet who can help you decide if you're using the right products, or if it may be time to try something new. Your vet may also suggest a fecal egg count test to see if your dewormer is working or even needed.

Not only can we check for nematode worms, but we can also check for a level of coccidia and make sure your coccidiostats are working.

Remember a low level of coccidia or worm eggs is going to occur even if you spend a lot on dewormers.

Joke Shared by Dr. Al

A man received the following text from his neighbor:

"I am so sorry Bob. I've been riddled with guilt, and I have to confess. I have been helping myself to your wife, day and night when you're not around. In fact, more than you. I do not get it at home, but that's no excuse. I can no longer live with the guilt, and I hope you will accept my sincerest apology with my promise that it won't ever happen again."

Bob in complete shock, didn't know what to do. A few moments later a second text came through from his neighbor.

"Darn spell check! I meant 'wi-fi'!"

Dr. Al Martens is the author of the WVS monthly newsletter. To see past editions, visit www.waupunvet.com on our home page. Scroll to the bottom to find our newsletters.

Veterinary Tech Support Available on Farm

Waupun Veterinary Services has 3 licensed veterinary technicians that work in the office, Kari Slager, Brianna Westhuis, and Angie Arndt. They assist with a number of procedures in the field, especially high-volume procedures like writing health papers at auctions or laparoscopic (surgical) artificial insemination of sheep. Their services are billed by either including it in a procedure fee like sheep AI, or actually billing as a line item on an invoice. In every case, the veterinarian brings the technician to reduce the time the veterinarian spends on farm and the net result is a lower overall fee to the farm.

Our techs are busy in the labs, and a few are part-time, which makes it difficult to have them available on short notice. Consider requesting their help on some projects but try to call ahead several days when scheduling.

If you think a project that you are planning could benefit from a technician along with the veterinarian, reach out to the office or the veterinarian and ask about this service.

Experiences in Alaska

Dr. Ralph and I took his two high school kids to Alaska last month for four days of fishing. I didn't bring any fish home, just Covid, but it was enjoyable seeing the kids tirelessly casting. Ralph caught the biggest rainbow trout. He's pictured above with Oscar. At the age of 69, I was carded at every single establishment that served alcohol when I ordered a drink. The unisex bathrooms in the airport in Seattle threw Ralph's boys through a loop. We enjoyed this sign pictured at right.