April 2025 Newsletter

New Updates on Avian Influenza in Dairy Cattle

Avian Influenza virus is still present in raw cheese (cheese made with unpasteurized milk) after 60 days.

In Texas and other states where the virus has been a big problem, there are three factors that aren't talked about that probably had a big impact. First, in Texas, the dry-lot dairies where the disease arose are in the snow goose flyway.

According to a witness I talked to, the dry-lots are full of snow geese, so many that the cows at times are covered with goose poop.

Second, to save money, many of these dairies neither pre- nor post-dip. So, wild birds, who are the major carrier of avian influenza, defecate all over the cows, the cows are laying down in an area with their teats covered in goose crap, and the dairies don't dip. Milk has massive numbers of influenza virus in it from infected cows and without dipping it just spreads.

Third, farmers evidently trade milking cows frequently in Texas and California.

So far, Wisconsin has been spared, and possibly because of better husbandry, milking, and cow trading practices we will not get the virus.

Retained Placenta: *Differences in treatment from 1970 to Today*

If you rode with a dairy veterinarian on daily calls in 1970 that vet would have had several farm visits to remove a retained placenta or an (RP). Today the definition of an RP is failure to release the placenta within 24 hours of calving, but in 1970 the definition was when the smell got too great for the dairy farmer to tolerate.

The vet would have tied the cows tail out of the way, cleaned the back of the cow with a bucket and brush, and attempted to remove the placenta manually while wearing a sleave and possibly an arm protector. Rarely was the entire placenta removed and in the majority of cases the cow ended up with a more severe uterine infection than she would have had if the placenta had been left alone.

It was a case of doing more harm than good. In some cases when the vet was finished, part of the placenta remained in the uterus, the cervix closed in the next couple days, and some cows actually died.

The practice only provided income for the veterinarian. But it kept whoever had to milk the cow, kneeling beside the udder, from getting rotten placenta fluids spread on them with the cow's tail.

That 1970's vet would have climbed into the shower that night and stunk up that part of the house. And that vet's coveralls would have really been fragrant.

For a time, as DCAD ions and milk fever were being researched, it was felt that the RP was caused by the same calcium issues that caused milk fever. We now know that the placenta is released from the cow's uterus by the cow's immune system and retained placenta problems are related to an unhealthy immune system. The current accepted rate for RP's is 5%, but many farms have a much lower rate.

The immune system in a pre- fresh cow has a lot of challenges and needs to be in top shape. Proper diet with a balanced ration, and the amount of feed intake is critical for immune function. We know that the immune system uses a huge amount of energy. Social issues that cows face like pen moves play a part in immune function. Other concurrent diseases like mastitis forces the immune system to focus its energy in a different direction and may result in an RP.

The RP isn't as big a part of the veterinarian's job, but the incidence rate should always be watched.

A brief note on cattle imported from Canada that lose their ID. Canadian official ID tags start with the digits 124XXXXXXXXXX for a total of 15 digits. U.S. 840 tags are only allowed in U.S. born cattle. If an imported animal loses a tag, it needs to be retagged with a 964 tag, which we have at the clinic.

Dr. Al Shares Experience with Riding in an Electric Truck

My son-in-law recently bought an F-150 electric truck. He got a tremendous deal purchasing it with 8,000 miles on it for one-third the cost of new, but someone else got all the green credits.

It is quiet and smooth, and the acceleration is incredible. It has posi-traction and 4-wheel drive. Under the hood there is a trunk so there is more storage than my pickup. When he first bought it, he could plug it into his 120-volt garage outlet and get three miles of driving per hour of charge. He put a splitter plug on his dryer, which in Arizona is in the garage, and he was able to get maximum charging overnight. To upgrade the house to fast charge, it would cost from $5,000 to $10,000 additional. At max charge, the truck has about 200 miles of range.

He picked me up at the airport when I flew into Tucson, which is a 60-mile round trip. We headed back to the house, ate and hung out for a couple hours while the truck was plugged in. We then headed to Tucson with about a 70 percent 140-mile charge, which was adequate for the trip. We ran into a dust storm, which was quite something with 50 mph headwinds. The dash quickly told us we weren't going to make it to Tucson. So, with the dust storm and the traffic that slowed us, there was the additional anxiety of needing to find a charging station. Charging stations are rare, even on the interstate, so we had to get off at the next station and charge for 20 minutes. That was a fast charge station, and it charged over 50 cents a kWh, something we pay about 13 cents for at home. Cost per mile using the fast-charging station was similar to gasoline. Also, as our estimated remaining distance dropped, and the dashboard told us to turn off air conditioning or heat, and the truck computer reduced the acceleration power.

During the weekend in Tucson, we wasted at least an hour at charging stations, and because the last 20% of charge takes a lot longer to accomplish, we never fully charged. The downside was the anxiety of not knowing where we would find the next charge, how much farther until we needed a charge, doing the math to the next charging station, and the wasted time while charging.

Add a game app to your phone if you travel any distance with an electric vehicle.

Beef Industry in Process of Adapting Invisible Fence

The beef industry is in the process of adapting to the invisible fence that dog owners have used for years.

The similarity is that cattle wear collars like the dogs do, and the difference is that some brands use solar power to charge the collar.

There is an upfront base station expense of $5 to $10,000. One system uses cellular network, which obviously won't work in a lot of areas, but it does remove the base station costs. There is also collar expense.

Systems can work on areas less than half an acre. For farmers in our area there are a lot of possibilities. Heifer raising on smaller pasture areas that are a pain to fence would be a possibility. Even better, local farmers could back ground beef steers on cornstalks after combining. This is a common practice out west but because of fencing issues it is rarely used around this area.

Also, fall cover crops or winter wheat could be used to back ground for short periods of time. There is an article in "Drover's "magazine, March 2025 edition, if you have more interest. The magazine is free, so finding it online should be no problem.

New Drug Available for Respiratory Issues in Beef

Pradalex (pradofloxacin) is a new pneumonia antibiotic, the first for food animal use in over 10 years.

It is related to enrofloxacin the generic form or Baytril. They are both fluoroquinolones, but Pradalex is a newer generation.

The label is for use after 2 months of age in beef animals (not dairy). This is a single injection product. The meat withdrawal is only four days which makes it a great option in the constantly shrinking number of available treatment options.

The product is easy to inject, flows through a syringe well, and the dose is reasonable at 11.5 mls for a 500-pound animal.