

## **Keep Them Cycling**

Dr. John Las  
April 2015

Are you often frustrated with cystic cows? Do you wonder why sometimes it seems every other animal that is checked is cystic, although they don't all behave the same? You are not alone! During regular herd health visits and reproductive exams it is not uncommon to find a post partum cow or even a short bred animal that has a cystic ovary. However, in my personal experience there tends to be a seasonality associated with the condition with an increase in its incidence in the late winter to early spring.

Firstly, we should define cystic ovary disease. For an animal to be diagnosed as cystic, the ovarian structure typically has to be greater than 25mm and persist for a minimum of 10 days. However, with the use of the ultrasound becoming more widely accepted, there is evidence that follicles greater than 17mm have a high likelihood of turning into a cystic structure. Cystic ovarian disease occurs most commonly during the post partum period, from 30 to 60 days post calving, as normal ovarian activity resumes. There are two types of cysts, a follicular cyst or a luteal cyst (cystic structure containing luteal tissue). Treatment protocols typically address both types of cysts.

Multiple factors are known to contribute and predispose animals to cystic ovarian disease. The most common causes identified and not in any specific order are: metabolic diseases (ketosis, acidosis), excessive negative energy balance, low dry matter intake, mycotoxins, high productivity, stress, and endometritis.

Making a diagnosis can be challenging because the veterinarian only sees the cow on a single day of her cycle rather than following her daily for 10 days or more. We base our diagnosis on size of the ovarian structure (either via manual palpation or measurement on ultrasound), uterine tone and the stage of cycle the animal is in.

The only way to truly identify cystic ovarian disease is during reproductive work with the aid of an ultrasound allowing for the accurate determination of type and size of the ovarian structure. Regular, routine reproductive visits (Herd Health) will help identify affected and repeat offenders and establish treatment protocols for dealing with them. The use of milk or serum pregnancy tests is gaining popularity and is accurate for diagnosing pregnancy. However, they are not useful at providing insight on how to manage the open cow, nor are they useful for identifying cystic cows.

If post partum reproductive exams are not routinely performed on animals before the voluntary waiting period is over, consider enrolling them on a presync program to reduce the likelihood of cystic ovarian disease, as well as clear up an underlying endometritis.

Treatment should be aimed at identifying and correcting the underlying cause and addressing nutritional shortfalls and metabolic disorders. Hormonal treatments, such as giving GnRH and prostaglandins, or using them in ovsync protocols are also useful for follicle turnover and the return to normal ovarian activity and estrus cycle.

Discuss treatment options and develop a treatment protocol for cystic ovarian disease with your veterinarian and evaluate its effectiveness regularly. Work closely with a nutritionist to ensure regular feed samples are taken and the ration is balanced accordingly. This will not only help maximize production and reproduction, but is important for reducing metabolic disorders.

Early identification and treatment along with decreasing the occurrence of cystic ovarian disease will ensure that you effectively reach your reproductive goals.