

Stopping BVD at the door

Testing incoming animals provides some assurance that new animals coming into a herd aren't carrying the virus

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BRAD IS A BEEF farmer client who is in the market for a new bull, and perhaps a few replacement heifers.

He recently contacted me to find out how best to source these animals without leaving his herd at risk for bovine viral diarrhea.

Bovine Viral Diarrhea

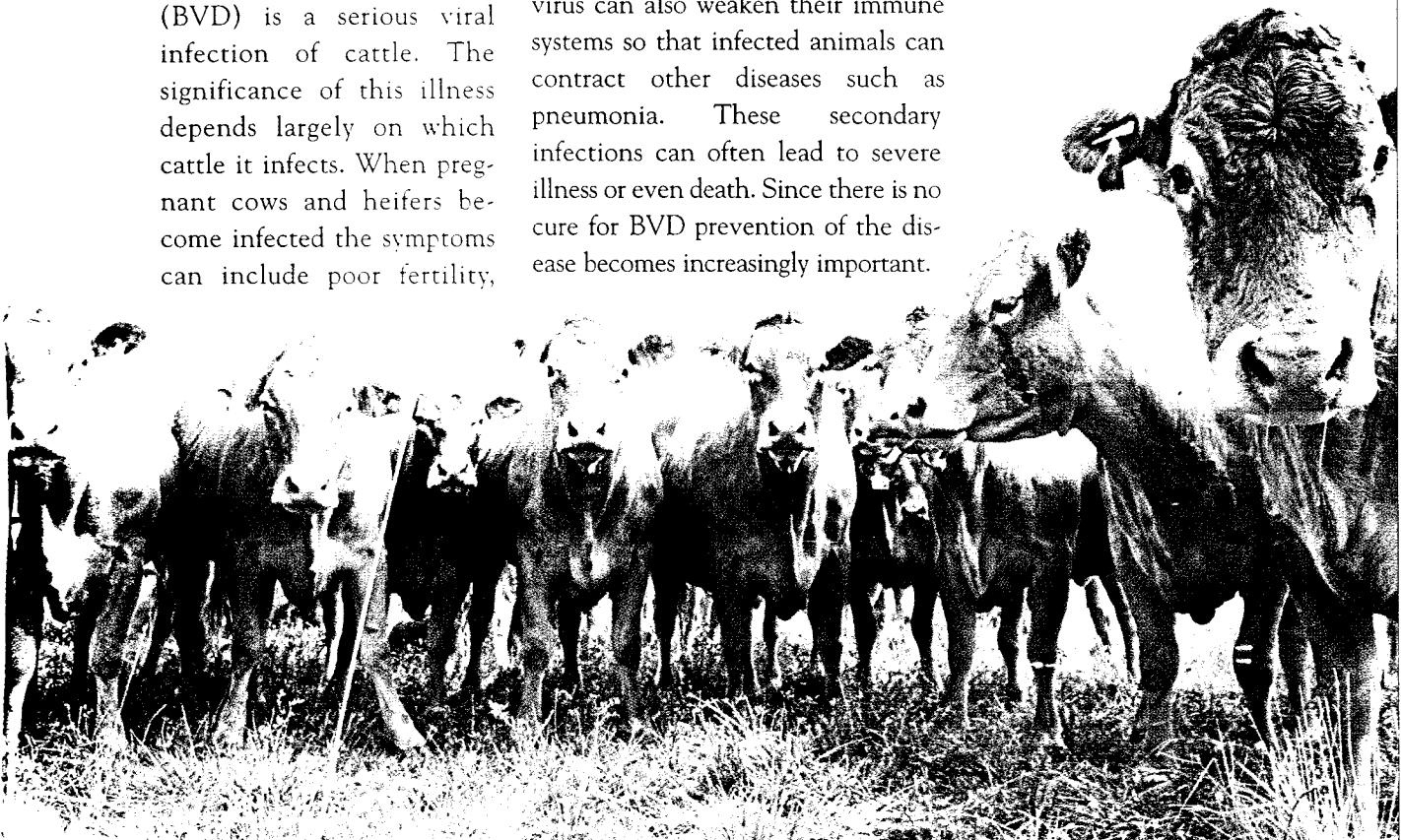
Bovine viral diarrhea (BVD) is a serious viral infection of cattle. The significance of this illness depends largely on which cattle it infects. When pregnant cows and heifers become infected the symptoms can include poor fertility,

abortion, premature birth or weak or deformed calves. Sometimes calves are born which appear normal but are carriers of the BVD virus. Because these calves are carriers of the virus for life, preventing these animals from becoming carriers is critical to limiting the virus' spread.

Other animals when infected can develop high fevers, sores in the mouth, diarrhea and go off-feed. The virus can also weaken their immune systems so that infected animals can contract other diseases such as pneumonia. These secondary infections can often lead to severe illness or even death. Since there is no cure for BVD prevention of the disease becomes increasingly important.

BVD virus usually is introduced onto farms through carrier animals. These are animals that became infected while still in their dam's uterus between 125 and 150 days of pregnancy.

Carrier animals (also known as persistently infected, or PI animals) are of particular risk because they appear normal but shed the virus through their body



secretions such as blood, mucus and manure. Animals who have recently become infected (acute infections) can also serve as a source of infection on farms. In both cases these animals contaminate penmates through nasal contact and contaminated items like waterbowls or nipples.

Testing incoming animals

Cattle in Brad's herd are vaccinated using a modified live vaccine, but since vaccination cannot provide complete prevention against BVD the best prevention strategy is avoiding buying it in. We decided to test any animals before purchase to avoid BVD at its source.

In arranging testing, we wanted to be certain we were not purchasing either persistently infected carrier animals, or acutely infected animals since both can serve as sources of the BVD virus. Most available laboratory tests allow screening for PI animals but may not detect acute infections.

Finding PI animals was very important to us since PI dams will always have PI calves thereby further allowing BVD spread. Finding negative dams is less reliable because a negative dam may carry and give birth to a PI calf. As a result, whenever buying pregnant cows or heifers remember to test calves after birth.

In the end Brad's purchases proved to be BVD-negative and were an important improvement to the quality of the herd. The testing was relatively inexpensive and provided excellent biosecurity control and peace of mind.

The purchasing of new animals is an excellent way to introduce new genetics and improve the overall quality of your herd. It is a valuable herd management tool for both commercial and purebred breeders. With the aid of a few small and inexpensive veterinary tests you can be confident that your purchases will positively impact your operation for years to come. *leaf*