



What Do You Do With PI Calves?

by **Shauna Rose Hermel**



“We need [a BVDV] eradication program that pays indemnity to producers with infected herds for the betterment of our national herd,” said Kansas State University veterinarian Daniel Thomas.

DENVER, CO (Jan. 31, 2006) — Calves born persistently infected (PI) with bovine viral diarrhea virus (BVDV) have been identified as a leading cause of disease spread. Researchers speaking at the scientific session of the BVD 2006 Symposium disagreed as to the best way to handle PI animals once identified.

PI calves result when pregnant cows are exposed to a noncytopathic type of the disease at about 1½-4 months of gestation — before the fetus has developed a mature immune system. These calves shed an enormous amount of the virus into the environment and serve as a means of infection for other animals in the herd.

Daniel Thomson, of Kansas State University’s College of Veterinary Medicine, provided four options for handling confirmed PI animals: (1) shoot; (2) salvage harvest; (3) seclude; or (4) sell.

While many others on the program encouraged immediate euthanasia, Thomson said it was not economically feasible without an indemnity program. BVD poses no human health risk, so there is no reason to be concerned that the animals enter the food chain.

Thomson said PI animals do

need to be segregated to prevent further disease transmission. He recommended immediate removal of PI animals from susceptible herds, whether at the cow-calf, stocker or feedlot level.

“Railing cattle to local packers or regional salvage slaughter facilities is sound biologically and more economical than euthanasia,” Thomson said.

Roughly 50% of PI calves on feed will die or become chronically ill before finishing, he noted, encouraging harvest by the time the cattle reach 850 pounds (lb.).

If quarantine facilities are available with adequate biosecurity, secluding animals from the rest of the herd while trying to take them to a more marketable end point may be an option, Thomson said. He described a “restart program” at the feedlot level that allowed diseased animals to be removed from the general population and finished in isolation.

The last option, selling, Thomson discouraged.

“Our industry has a moral and ethical obligation to not sell known diseased or damaged animals to other parties,” he explained. If someone feels selling a PI animal is the only viable option, full

disclosure must be admitted.

While a discouraged option, Thomson said it was necessary to allow selling so as not to discourage testing.

In his proceedings paper, Thomson pointed out the Academy of Veterinary Consultants has a position statement calling for a national eradication program for BVDV.

“Today we are asking producers to remove animals from their herds for lesser value than what they

could get from just selling the PI cattle through marketing channels,” he said. “We need an eradication program that pays indemnity to producers with infected herds for the betterment of our national herd. This in turn will stimulate full cooperation, and disclosure will occur.”

Thomson recommended a permanent form of identification for PI animals and a system similar to the brucellosis quarantine and slaughter program.



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