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EC624 High Lights on Abortion Disease in Cattle

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High Lights on Abortion Disease In Cattle

DR. L. VAN ES
Department of Animal Pathology and Hygiene

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High Lights on Abortion Disease in Cattle

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Abortion is the result of death or serious sickness of the unborn calf. In the great majority of cases the cause is a germ particularly capable of damaging the organs by which the calf receives sustenance from its mother.

The germ causing abortion is taken in by cows with contaminated food and drinking water. Herd bulls may or may not play a part in the transmission of the infection.

The abortion germ is apt to remain localized in the body of infected cows. It is particularly capable to maintain itself and multiply in the pregnant uterus and in the functioning udder.

Cows which harbor the germs may be detected by certain blood tests. These tests, however, do not reveal whether or not a cow will abort or has already done so. On the other hand they may furnish a valuable indication of the presence of the infection in a herd and the depth of its penetration.

Heifers, not yet of breeding age, in the great majority of cases, do not harbor the abortion germs for any considerable length of time, even if born of infected dams. Exceptions to this general rule are rare.

At no time is the number of abortion germs set free in a stable, pasture, or yard, greater than when a cow actually aborts. An act of abortion is the most serious accident that can happen in a herd of sound cows and its consequences may be a source of financial loss for many years.

Traffic in mature cows, pregnant or not, is responsible for a wide distribution of the disease.

How long abortion germs can live in pastures or stables, outside the animal body, has not been ascertained with accuracy, but allowance should be made for a considerable degree of longevity.

Abortion disease in cattle has for more than 35 years been assiduously investigated and studied by a large number of research workers and while the subject will probably never be entirely exhausted, **the knowledge already at hand is ample to formulate preventive measures. The following are the most basic factors in prevention:**

All attempts to "cure" abortion disease by drugs have thus far failed and no relief can be expected from that source.

The results obtained from vaccination show great variations, ranging between a reduction of the abortions to a mere 5 per cent of what they were before and a frank increase over the ones prior to the treatment.

Vaccination is entirely out of place in non-infected herds and it does not eradicate the disease from the others. It causes cattle to react positively to the blood test.

A herd may be divided in infected, or reacting, and infection-free animals by means of the blood test, with a fairly good prospect of checking the disease in the latter group.

After an abortion in a herd, if not before, the herd manager will do well to challenge his animals by having his veterinarian collect blood samples to be submitted to a laboratory for a test.

If herds are to be started or new stock introduced by purchase, preference should be given to open heifers or cows with a recent negative test record.

Young stock should always be kept separate from older animals after weaning. Such young animals are scarcely ever infected and they constitute the principal hope on many infected farms or ranches.

All possible efforts should be made to prevent animals from contaminating stables and pastures by actually aborting in such places. With the first signs of impending abortion, the animal should be segregated so that the body discharges can do no harm. They should remain isolated until all evidence of discharge has disappeared.

Aborted calves and afterbirths should either be destroyed by fire or be deeply buried. All objects which were in contact with such material must be thoroughly disinfected.

For more detailed information, consult Nebraska Agricultural Experiment Station Circular No. 21.

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