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*California's Trichomonosis Control Program: The first three years*

The current California Trichomonosis Control program grew out of concerns expressed by cattle producers suffering from the economic and production losses described in last month's column. The Cattle Health Committee of CCA initiated a series of meetings to address those concerns, and these eventually led to the development of the current program. This was accomplished mainly through CCA but with input from the Farm Bureau, the dairy industry, UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine, the CAHFS (California Animal Health and Food Safety) lab system, CDFA, practicing veterinarians, and information from other states with Trichomonosis control programs. Legislation sponsored by CCA gave CDFA the authority to create the regulations guiding the program. Those regulations went into effect in September 2003.

The current Trichomonosis Program focuses on three major areas.

1. Testing requirements on bulls brought into California. Making sure we don't import the disease from other states.
2. The control and disposition of known Trichomonosis-positive animals. Making sure that known infected animals go only to slaughter.
3. The identification and notification of any potentially exposed neighbors once a positive animal has been diagnosed. Trying to clean up any other herds in an area where an infected herd is identified.

Additionally, there are a number of quality control standards that were established and must be met by veterinarians taking samples from bulls for official Trichomonosis testing and for the laboratories that culture the samples these veterinarians obtain. For example, only Trichomonosis-certified, licensed, and accredited veterinarians can take samples for Trichomonosis testing. All laboratories that perform Trichomonosis culturing must also be certified by attending a training session at the CAHFS Laboratory system.

The program has received widespread support from nearly everyone involved or affected. One criticism has been that the regulations do not do enough to affect the control of trichomonosis in local areas or in California as a whole. The program was not designed to be an eradication campaign but it was hoped there would be some decrease in the incidence of the disease over time. So far that does not seem to be happening. The number of infected herds identified has remained fairly constant over the 3 years the program has been in place. Since all testing is voluntary, the number of infected herds represents an unknown percentage of the true number of infected herds. A disturbing finding since the program's inception is that some infected herds that have taken the necessary steps to eliminate Trichomonosis have become re-infected in subsequent years.

The most common way a herd becomes infected with trichomonosis is by comingling with infected cattle. This can occur with neighboring ranches or on common grazing grounds. If your bull breeds your neighbor's infected cows he can bring the disease back into your herd.

Likewise, if a neighboring infected bull breeds your cows you will likely get the disease. Infected herds that do not take any measures to diagnose or eliminate trich are thought to be the major source for the spread of this disease and responsible for re-infection of herds that do try to eliminate it.

The chart below is a summary of information on infected herds in California for the 3 years the program has been in place. There are four field offices of the CDFA Animal Health Branch that administer the program. To date, no positive herds have been reported in the Ontario District, which is south of the Tehachapi Mountains.

Number of infected herds identified by CDFA District:

District	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006
Redding	30	26 4 repeats	30 5 repeats
Modesto	11	13 2 repeats	5 1 repeat
Tulare	12	18 2 repeats	13 2 repeats
Totals	53	57 8 repeats	48 8 repeats

These results indicate that the number of herds infected has not changed significantly and the number of repeat herds is too high. The state of Oregon adopted a program similar to California's several years earlier (we needed to pass legislation to have a program; Oregon just needed to adopt regulations) and they have made similar observations—the number of infected herds did not decrease and the number of repeat herds was too high. Oregon has initiated a number of changes to their control program and some California producers that move herds between California and Oregon have already been affected by these new regulations. It has become obvious that certain changes to the California Trichomonosis Control program are needed if we want to make progress in controlling this disease once it has been identified in an area. Most of the Western States have some form of trichomonosis control program, some for several years now. We can learn from their experiences—both positive and negative. Next month we will discuss proposed changes to the program that will address some of the problems we have seen.

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