

Animal Industry News Update

from the LCES Animal Science Specialists



Animal Health (Dr. Steve Nicholson) **A medley of potential problems producers may see include:**

Bermuda grass tremors (BGT) may cause muscle twitches involving the head, shoulder and flank of intoxicated cattle. These signs increase when the animal is excited. The rear legs may be lifted higher than normal when an affected animal is forced to move quickly. Horses are less severely affected. This rare condition has occurred in bermuda grass pastures in northwest and northeast Louisiana. Hay retains the toxic agent. Hundreds of herds were affected in 1971. I have not heard of a case in recent years.

Ergot in the seeds of dallisgrass hay can induce the same clinical picture as BGT. The ergot in question is *Claviceps paspali*, which does not cause gangrene of the limbs.

There are a few reports of oak poisoning in cattle that have eaten large amounts of green acorns in the past few weeks. Kidney failure and digestive tract damage cause the cow to feel sick and not keep her muzzle clean. Constipation, then a loose stool that may contain a lot of blood, is a common finding.

Red maple trees are dropping their leaves. Horses are poisoned by eating a pound or so of the wilted, dry leaves. Diarrhea, dark red urine, severe anemia, brown blood and jaundice are signs of poisoning. Affected horses may survive if kidney function can be maintained by intravenous fluids. Fluid therapy is essential to assist the kidneys in removal of hemoglobin from damaged red blood cells.

A cold wet winter will present a challenge for beef producers where cows are calving in harsh conditions. Baby calf diarrhea may cause dehydration, shock and death. Calves that do not receive an adequate amount of good quality colostrum within 12 hours after birth are at high risk of developing diarrhea and septicemia. Oral treatment or use of a tube to put fluids into the stomach may be all most scouring calves need. Calves that are dehydrated, weak and cold may need intravenous fluids and electrolytes dripped in over a few hours if they are to live.

Producers should take care when beginning to supplement cattle this winter. Offering a large amount carbohydrate feedstuff (rice, crushed corn, grain dust pellets) to hungry cattle often results in acute, fatal indigestion. Supplements containing urea must be fed according to manufacturers' recommendations.

Hot-mix feeds (30% salt) may cause salt poisoning if fed in large amounts to salt-hungry cattle!

Petroleum discovery and production sites may have high saltwater (brine) within reach of cattle. If fresh water becomes unavailable ... frozen, electric power out, cattle may drink it. Brine won't freeze.

Horses (Dr. Clint Depew) **Detecting Lameness in Horses**

Detecting lameness and maintaining soundness in horses are constant problems in the horse industry. Modern horses typically weigh from 1,100 to 1,500 pounds and put tremendous stress on relatively small feet. The emphasis in many breeding programs has been toward refinement, which tends to exacerbate the problem.

The athletic maneuvers expected of the modern performance horse exert a great deal of stress and concussion on the feet and legs of the horse. Additionally the effects of humid climates and wet pastures tend to soften feet and result in hoof wall cracks, breaks and soft soles. This often results in abscesses. Therefore, detecting and evaluating lameness in horses are constant challenges for horse owners. Lameness may manifest as barely discernable unsoundness (grade 1) to severe unsoundness (Grade 4-5). In the severe cases, the tender or non-weight-bearing leg is obvious, and diagnosis and treatment are straightforward. Unfortunately, most lameness is barely discernable and, in some cases, the horse just doesn't feel right or is just a little off. Since most lameness will become markedly worse if left untreated, evaluation procedures to identify the early signs of problems is valuable in the detection and treatment of lameness.

In moderate to severe lameness, head bobbing, refusal to move or non weight bearing will indicate the location of the problem. In less severe cases, a short or quick step with one leg is usually the first sign of tenderness and impending lameness. Detecting very slight or early signs of lameness is difficult, but most good horseman will feel that the horse is "just not quite right." Gait analysis researchers are developing new techniques for evaluating low grade lameness. Measurement of the horse's stride at a walk or a trot will indicate which leg is lame. The horse will normally take a shorter stride with the lame leg to put less weight on that leg. So if lameness is suspected, measure the stride length of the horse's front and rear legs. The leg taking the shorter stride is the affected leg.

Recent research at the University of Missouri indicates that the rise and fall of the pelvis is a good

indicator of rear leg lameness. In a sound horse the pelvis rises and drops equally when each leg is taking a stride. In the lame horse the pelvis drops less when the leg is on the ground and rises less following push off, indicating that the horse is taking a shorter stride and using that leg less as demonstrated by its reluctance to bear full weight on the lame leg. The best visual assessment is by watching the pelvis move up and down during each stride, particularly at a trot. If the pelvis is moving symmetrical as viewed from the side or the rear, the horse is sound. If the movement is not symmetrical, the side that does not rise as high or drop as low as the other side is the unsound leg.

Measuring leg strides and observing the symmetry of the pelvis movements are the keys to detecting slight lameness. Starting treatment early can result in an improved prognosis for a full recovery and soundness.

Beef (Dr. Jason Rowntree)

Possible BSE Cow Turns Up Negative

An inconclusive test result in the new surveillance program to test cattle for Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) was announced by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) this past week. Although the USDA confirmed the suspect cow did not enter the food chain, no insight on her age, breed, location or origin was given. The Bio-Rad ELISA rapid test was used as an initial test. It involves a three well method and, in this sample, two of the three wells were positive. In an article published on MeatingPlace.com, Brad Crutchfield, vice president of Bio-Rad, the company that manufactures the rapid test used in the USDA surveillance program, stated that more than 95% of all double reactive tests are confirmed positive. Further testing at the National Veterinary Services Laboratory, Ames, Iowa, has found the sample to be negative for BSE, however.

Market Outlook

Interestingly, another potential BSE positive is lurking around the holiday months. After last year's positive spring season, beef spending was actually higher than the previous year. How will this potential positive cow affect the bottom line of our Louisiana cow-calf producers? Although beef consumption is likely to be unaffected, the feeder cattle outlook is less clear, reports Cattle~Fax. The spring feeder cattle outlook is projected to be high in late December and early January (prices from \$108 to \$109); instead these prices may fall to \$101 to \$104. This market uncertainty stems from the possibility of export markets remaining closed.

New Program Scheduled for Next August

A Stocker Cattle/Heifer Development program is scheduled for August 8 in Brookhaven, Miss. This is a cooperative program in which county agents and beef specialists from Mississippi and Louisiana will provide a program emphasizing development of weanling cattle into future stages of production. Confirmed speakers from Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi will give information on topics ranging from heifer development for Brahman-oriented cattle to nutrition for calves transitioning from weaning to winter forage. Please mark your calendar.

Dairy (Dr. Charlie Hutchison)

Milk Prices

According to most of the experts and information from the milk co-op, milk prices will fall below the trigger for the MILC payment as early as January or February, and milk prices will remain below the trigger point until late summer or early fall.

Several indicators prompted the experts to predict this decline in milk prices: cheap feed for the rest of 2004 and carrying over into 2005; milk-feed ratio above 3.5; increasing allocations of BST; increased milk production for the fourth consecutive month, with October's production being 1.3% higher fueled by an increase in cow numbers (26,000 higher than year ago figures for October); milk per cow at 15 pounds higher; decreased cow slaughter numbers for the third month in a row, with slaughter numbers for October being 197,000 dairy cows, which was 79,000 fewer than in October 2003.

Someone forgot to tell the cheese and futures market about all of these indicators, however. Cheese prices and futures contracts tumbled the first week of October with block cheese ending the week 21.25 cents lower — at \$1.3725 per pound. Barrels closed at \$1.315 — down 11.75 cents for the week. In response to the cheese price, Class III milk futures contracts for October, November and December all posted double-digit losses. The December contract even fell below \$12 — its lowest level since January. The next week, cheese prices rebounded with blocks gaining 14.75 cents to close the week at \$1.52 per pound. Barrels were up 17.25 cents and closed at \$1.4875. Cheese prices basically remained steady for a couple of weeks and then started to rise again closing on Tuesday of Thanksgiving week at \$1.8025 for blocks.

This increased strength of the cheese market has carried over into the Class III futures market, with the December contract closing up 33 cents at \$16.24. In fact, at the recent close of markets, the November and December contracts were each trading more than \$4 above the five-year average.

USDA announced that the Class I price for December will be \$14.43 per cwt. That is an increase of \$ 0.14 /cwt over the November price and is \$ 0.74/cwt above the trigger price of \$13.69 for the MILC payment. December is the eighth consecutive month with no MILC payment.

MILC & CWT

Both houses of Congress approved a \$388 billion omnibus spending bill November 20. Some analysts said that tying the MILC extension to the omnibus spending bill would be one of the best chances for getting the MILC program extended through the life of the Farm Bill. However, during budget negotiations, legislators seeking to extend the Milk Income Loss Contract program were defeated. For those still hoping that the program is extended, Congress will still have time to extend the program before it expires in September 2005.

On November 17, National Milk announced its Cooperatives Working Together program (CWT II) will retire 378 dairy herds, which will amount to about 51,700 cows and 931 million pounds of milk. That amount of milk represents 0.55% of the U.S. milk supply. Of the 732 bids submitted, 52% were accepted. Auditors are expected to make farm visits to the aforementioned herds in early December. Even though only 48 Western herds have been selected in CWT II, these herds represent the largest amount of production and the most cows of the five regions. Nearly 18,000 cows will be culled from the West, accounting for 353 million pounds of milk. The Southwest will lose \$16,500 cows; the Midwest, 8,900; the Southeast, 4,300, and the Northeast, 4,100.

Poultry (Dr. Theresia Lavergne) **Reducing Energy Costs in Poultry Houses**

The increasing cost of fuel is causing broiler growers to assess their fuel usage practices; however, reduced growth rate, increased feed intake and increased incidence of respiratory disease are more prevalent, and air quality is reduced when utility costs increase. It is important for poultry growers to continue to ventilate their houses properly and provide a comfortable environment for broilers, even when fuel costs are high.

As a means of trying to lower energy usage and costs, poultry growers can follow these proposed suggestions.

- Insulate poultry houses, and repair or replace damaged insulation.
- Protect insulation against moisture by using a vapor barrier.
- Seal all air leaks and wall cracks.

- Eliminate all cracks between curtains and the house, and repair all curtain holes.
- Weather-strip all door openings.
- Clean and check thermostats and timers for accuracy.
- Keep litter moisture to a minimum by using proper ventilation and repairing water leaks; check and clean pressure regulators and filters.
- Use proper ventilation for the needs of the birds and the house conditions.
- Circulate air throughout the house and maintain a uniform temperature at all levels.
- Use increased ventilation during the warmest part of the day to control litter moisture.
- Clean fans and shutters frequently; cover and seal unused fan openings.
- Select the most efficient fans for your needs.
- Brood properly; keep the brooders clean.
- Adjust the heater pilot lights to the manufacturer's specifications.
- Check each brooder for gas leaks.
- Maintain proper gas line pressure as specified by the manufacturer.
- Increase light efficiency by cleaning light bulbs frequently and replacing dim bulbs.

(Source: POULTRY TIMES, October 25, 2004)

Funding Approved for a Bird Flu Program

Congress has approved a low-pathogenic avian influenza (LPAI) program. A total of \$23 million has been approved for activities related to the prevention, control and eradication of LPAI.

The program includes funding for surveillance, administering tests and disinfection of live bird markets. There is concern that LPAI could mutate into highly pathogenic forms. Therefore, to prevent this from happening, funding was approved for both the commercial industry and live birds markets.