

Trichomaniasis: The Silent but Devastating Cattle Disease

Trich in the News

You may have noticed in the news in December, that the South Dakota Animal Industry Board was notified of three herds diagnosed with bovine Trichomaniasis in three separate counties in their state. In light of that news, and the fact that a lot of producers are still preg checking their herds and making bull purchasing decisions for the upcoming year, we wanted to remind producers of the distressing cattle disease we commonly refer to as 'trich'.

What is Trich?

Trichomaniasis is a venereal disease found in cattle caused by a protozoa organism called *Tritrichomonas foetus*. This small organism makes its home in the reproductive tract of cows and bulls, eventually making its way to the cow's uterus after breeding, affecting fertility and causing early embryonic death. This disease can cause devastating losses to a cow herd as there are only few outward symptoms to observe, but can cause infertility of an entire herd. Typically prognosis is made after a rancher notices high rates of open cows after preg checking or expecting calving date.

Symptoms

While bulls show no outward symptoms at all, they are the main vector of infection within a herd. The protozoan thrives in the tissue lining of the bull's penis and preputial sheath, potentially infecting each cow he breeds thereafter. Typically, once infected, bulls stay infected for life.

Cows may show slight symptoms including mild vaginal discharge 1 to 3 weeks after being infected, but usually this goes on unnoticed. The infected cow will then come back into estrus (heat) after losing her calf, causing later calving dates, extended breeding season and higher chances of open cows. Infertility of cows can be common up to 5 months after infection. Because its symptoms fly under the radar, transmission through an entire herd can happen very quickly and unknowingly.

Although clinical signs in bulls are absent, the disease is more easily diagnosed in bulls because of their long term carrier status. It is recommended that bulls be tested for trich before each breeding season through a scraping of the inside of their preputial sheath, done by your veterinarian. There are different testing methods and number of samples required with each method, so speak with your local veterinarian to determine which is right for your herd.

Treatment & Prevention

There is currently no approved treatment for cattle infected with trich, so the best way to protect your herd is to concentrate on clean bulls and the prevention of infection into your herd. Experts recommend you purchase virgin bulls if possible, and if not, isolate and test each bull before exposing them to your herd. Another important prevention measure, albeit difficult at times, is to keep the neighbor's bulls out of your pasture, as they may not take the same prevention measures you do and could potentially be a disease carrier. This goes hand in hand with good fences, as we all know 'great fences make great neighbors'.

Preg checking your herd in a timely manner after breeding season may help to identify problems early on. If you do introduce purchased females into your herd, virgin heifers or cows from a reputable source are the best bet.

Finally, keep accurate records of your herd's reproductive efficiency to allow you to identify potential problems. Bulls confirmed with trich should be sold for slaughter only, not breeding. Trich is not a disease of human health concern.

Your Responsibility

Trichomaniasis is considered a Schedule 2 **notifiable** disease through the [Animal Health Act](#), which means that the owner of the animal or an authorized person must report the presence of the disease to the chief provincial veterinarian within 24 hours. This is typically done through your local veterinarian after they have confirmed presence of the disease. Your Agricultural Fieldman can also notify the chief veterinarian if needed. Under the Animal Health Act, a notifiable disease requires monitoring to ensure further animals are not affected. This is in contrast to a reportable disease, which may require eradication to prevent disease spreading. BSE would be an example of a reportable disease under the Animal Health Act.

If you suspect trich may be affecting your herd, take immediate quarantine action of your herd and contact your veterinarian for confirmation.