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New Voluntary Cattle Program Could Enhance Marketing

A new voluntary cattle health program can help ranchers market their breeding animals by reassuring buyers that bulls are free of cattle trichomoniasis, an infection that can be spread during breeding, and which can cause cows to abort and take a long time to become pregnant again. . Bill Hyman, executive director for the Independent Cattlemen's Association of Texas (ICA), which represents about 8,000 cow-calf ranchers, explained that trichomoniasis is caused by a microscopic protozoan. With sexual rest and, sometimes, a vaccine treatment, a cow may clear the disease, but there is no such luck for infected bulls, which must be sent to slaughter.

“For more than a year, Texas has had state regulations requiring that bulls entering Texas either be young virgins or have a negative test for cattle trichomoniasis. Since January, the virgin status or testing requirements also extended to Texas bulls undergoing a change of possession. There are no testing requirements for cows.” said Hyman, who, with other cattle industry, veterinary and university representatives, serves on a regulatory working group to address the cattle trichomoniasis in Texas.

“From the beginning of this regulatory program, ranchers requested a framework to develop ‘trichomoniasis-free’ status for their cattle herd, to enhance the marketability of their animals,” said Hyman. “With this voluntary certification program, ranchers can assure buyers that their bulls and cows are free of this hard-to-eradicate disease. Ranchers with a certified herd also will be able to sell bulls without a test.”

Hyman noted that this new certification program involves not only bulls, but also female cattle. The certification has four basic components:

1. Ranchers enter into a voluntary agreement with the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) and have the non-virgin bulls in their herd tested annually for trichomoniasis three consecutive years. Records must be kept for examination by TAHC representatives.
2. During the three years their herd is earning certification, pre-existing cattle trichomoniasis regulations must be followed for identifying, isolating and testing non-virgin bulls prior to any change of possession. Test results must be known prior to physically moving the bull to a new herd.
3. Bulls in a participating herd must be tested prior to slaughter, which can be accomplished at the processing facility, with prior arrangements.

4. Female cattle added to a participating herd must come from another 'trich-free' certified herd, or
 - a. be a virgin, or be bred only to a bull that has tested negative for trichomoniasis, or
 - b. be at least 120 days pregnant and be examined by an accredited veterinarian, or
 - b. have a calf and no known exposure to an infected bull.

“The cattle industry had to address this breeding disease, in order to protect Texas cattle,” said Hyman. “Industry representatives worked for more than a year to establish regulations that would be effective and sensible. Now, with these new voluntary standards in place, ranchers can establish and certified trichomoniasis-free herd, which could be a very attractive marketing tool.”