

# Bull problem led to extra days open

by James A. Jarrett, D.V.M.

**A**LTHOUGH the unusual disease conditions don't occur very often, they can still be just as devastating when they do infect the cows in a dairy herd.

When Walter called to discuss what he feared to be a breeding problem, I was surprised. His is one of the better-managed herds with which I work.

It seems that over a period of the last several months, before his call, the conception rate in his 500-cow herd was approaching 3 services per conception, rather than the 2 to 2.5 services as an achievable goal in a well-managed herd.

Knowing of Walt's management level, I was fairly sure that heat detection was not likely to be the problem. This is opposed to the case in many herds where heat detection is the major reason for extended open days.

After discussing the problem with him by phone, it was decided that I should visit his farm within the next two weeks. Following my conversation with him, I made arrangements for the local veterinarian to join me.

We found that the cows were generally kept in the artificial insemination groups until they had two or three services or until they had been fresh over 120 days. At that point, they were moved into a group with bulls for natural service.

## **A.I. was working . . .**

Records and pregnancy checks revealed that the conception rate for cows bred A.I. was quite good. These cows were becoming pregnant just over two services. However, the conception rate for cows in the bull pens was really alarming at greater than four services per conception, based on normal heat cycles every 21 days.

One of the first things we did was to fertility test and do a complete breeding soundness exam on all the bulls. Initially, the results of these exams looked good. That was before

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we received the results of lab tests performed on samples from the bulls.

At the same time, we collected blood samples and reproductive tract samples from several of the cows that had not conceived on time and did rectal palpations on them, as well.

Results of the tests run on the blood samples did not help us much; however, the samples collected from the reproductive tracts were quite revealing, but I get ahead of myself with the story.

## **Uteruses contained fluid . . .**

Palpations of the reproductive tracts on many of the open cows were very interesting. The uteruses in many of these animals contained fluid. It was

## **Top 10 reasons producers turn to the bull**

**I**N A recent survey, we asked producers why they turn to the bull to get their cows and heifers bred. Many sighted reasons like time, convenience, and facilities. Yet other producer's rationale proved more interesting.

10. A.I. bulls aren't necessarily better than bulls from one of my better cows.
9. Have a good tame bull on hand.
8. Let nature take its course.
7. I use Angus bulls for calving ease.
6. Inexperienced employees.
5. They're only heifers.
4. Less mind boggling.
3. Do not have facilities for rodeo.
2. Heifer raiser is lazy.

And number 1. — A.I. doesn't retire to beef in the freezer.

samples of this fluid we submitted for laboratory examination.

The laboratory diagnosis confirmed what I suspected after the palpations. Four of the eight samples of uterine fluid were positive for trichomonas.

This is a single-celled parasite that causes venereal disease in cattle, usually resulting in a lack of conception. It is most often transmitted through natural service, as was the suspected case in Walt's herd.

I was surprised at first that all the lab samples from the bulls were negative. Further conversations with Walt and his herdsman helped to explain.

About two weeks before my visit to the farm, Walt had sold three older bulls that he had been using in the natural-service pens and replaced them with younger ones. With this information, we decided that one or more of the older bulls were most likely the carrier of the disease.

## **Stopped bull breeding . . .**

In order to bring this condition under control, we suggested that one of the first things to do was to discontinue all natural service on the farm, even in the replacement heifers, as there was some possibility that one of the bulls may have exposed some of the animals in that group, as well.

Rather than take a chance of harboring the disease on the farm in any way, it was also decided to sell all the bulls for beef. Open cows were handled on an economic basis, as usual. Many of them had to be removed from the herd as a result of long open days and lowered production.

On a subsequent visit to the farm approximately six months later, we were no longer able to find any animals with symptoms of the disease. However, I did suggest that Walt continue to use only artificial insemination, not only from a disease standpoint, but to improve the genetics in his herd, as well. I also recommended that if he should decide to use natural service again in the future that all bulls be thoroughly tested before being released into the herd. 