

Fly (Mule) in the Ointment

An obscure Kane County mule kicked much of the wind out of the Centennial Celebration at Richmond Black and White Days. This spring national dairy show and elite dairy sale moved forward as planned, but with fewer exhibitors, less buyers and a reduced number of cattle. It's dreadful how years of detailed planning can be altered with an unanticipated eleventh hour dilemma from an unseen mule 400 miles down state.

The fore mentioned mule was diagnosed last week with vesicular stomatitis (VS), a viral disease that primarily affects horses and cattle. An additional 13 horses are believed to have been in contact with the mule, prompting a mandatory quarantine of all 14 animals. VS is recognized internationally as a reportable disease. As such, all cases of VS are required to be reported to State or Federal Veterinarians.

Because Utah has an active livestock quarantine, it became near impossible for Canadian exhibitors to receive the necessary permits to bring their cattle across the boarder. Interstate movement was also impacted as exhibitors from other states also became cautious about bring their dairy animals into our state, not knowing if they could return without restrictions. The economic impact of potentially having their dairy herds quarantined was much greater than the \$10,000 purse to the Grand Champion cow. Our Utah State Veterinarian was very confident the threat is fully contained in Kane County, and did his best to quell concerns. None-the-less, exhibitors who have been coming to Richmond for decades chose not to take the risk and stayed home.

A factsheet from the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service teaches that VS is particularly significant because its outward signs are similar to those of foot-and-mouth disease, a foreign animal disease that was eradicated from the United States in 1929. Clinical tests conducted by the National Veterinary Services Lab in Ames, Iowa, is the only official way to positively identify the disease. A diagnosis can be based on antibody tests using serum samples from the animal and/or by detecting virus from swabs of lesions, blister fluid, and tissue biopsies.

Initial clinical signs of VS may be excessive salivation from an infected animal. Close examination of the mouth reveals blanched and raised vesicles or blister-like lesions on the inner surfaces of the lips, gums, tongue, and/or dental pad. In addition, these blister-like lesions can form on the lips, nostrils, hoofs, vulva, and teats. The blisters swell and break, which causes oral pain and much discomfort. The infected animals are reluctant to eat or drink, resulting in a severe drop in milk production for dairy cows. Lameness and severe weight loss is also common.

There is no specific treatment or cure for VS, though infected animals seldom die from the disease. Premises containing infected animals are quarantined until 21 days after the lesions of the last affected animals have healed. As a result, quarantine can be lengthy and costly. Livestock owners can protect their animals by avoiding congregation of animals in the vicinity where VS has occurred. Good sanitation and quarantine practices on affected farms usually contain the infection until it dies out of its own accord.

It is not fully known how VS spreads from animal to animal. Insects and mechanical transmission and movement of animals are thought to be factors. Once the disease is introduced into a herd, it may move from animal to animal by contact or exposure to saliva or fluid from ruptured vesicles. Humans rarely contact VS, but they can become infected. Individuals should use personal protective measures when handling affected animals.

Even with the mule scare we had a great dairy show and sale in Richmond last week. The series of events celebrated 100 years of exhibiting and improving quality Holstein dairy cattle. We entertained visitors from several states and examined dairy cattle that were near perfect. The high selling dairy animal sold for \$22,000 and owner of the Grand Champion cow went home with a \$10,000 check. A crew of tired volunteers took a deep breath and rejoiced that things went as well as they did. Our numbers were fewer than anticipated for a centennial event, but the Kane County mule hauls all the blame. Already, plans are being laid for the 101st Richmond dairy show and sale next year.

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