Getting Beef Bulls Tested for Trichomoniasis
By: Jacob Hadfield

For cattle producers, one of the most critical components of a successful breeding program is the bull. A single bull often breeds 20 to 30 cows a year, and some studies suggest this number may be even higher. Given this significant role, it is essential that bulls who possess high genetic quality are selected to pass on desirable traits to the herd. Since bulls have such a strong impact on a cattle breeding program it is essential to ensure bulls are free of sexually transmitted diseases, as such diseases can rapidly spread throughout a herd.

One of the most contagious sexually transmitted diseases in cattle is trichomoniasis (trich). Trichomoniasis causes both infertility and abortions, leading to severe economic losses. Due to its ease of transmission, the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food monitors the disease closely. According to the Utah Administrative Code, Rule R58-21, all bulls 12 months of age and older must be tested annually for trichomoniasis by an accredited veterinarian using an approved test. Testing must occur between October 1 and April 30 or before bulls are exposed to female cattle.

Bulls must test negative before being introduced to female cattle. Those that pass the test receive a trich tag in their right ear from the certified veterinarian who conducted the test. Exemptions apply to bulls in confined operations, those going directly to slaughter, or those housed in qualified feedlots. Bulls participating in rodeos or livestock shows are also exempt unless they have access to grazing or exposure to female cattle.

Because bulls serve as reservoirs and primary transmitters of trichomoniasis, Utah's trich regulations focus on them. The disease spreads quickly, as infected bulls mate with multiple cows. Bulls with trichomoniasis show no outward symptoms, making diagnosis difficult without testing. Producers typically detect the disease when they observe an unusually high number of open (non-pregnant) cows. Infected cows usually experience early fetal loss, leaving little to no visible signs beyond a low pregnancy rate.

Preventing trichomoniasis is the most effective control strategy. All bulls should be tested before introduction to the herd. Artificial insemination is another preventive measure that eliminates the risk of disease transmission.

For more information, contact the Extension office at 435-623-3450.