

Veterinary Link: Designing a trichomoniasis control plan

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Trichomoniasis (trich) is a highly contagious disease that can cause cows to abort an early pregnancy when the organism is passed from infected bulls to cows during mating. This disease is very important to the cattle industry because infected herds experience very

severe losses — commonly up to a 30% to 50% reduction in the number of cows calving.

Infected cows and bulls appear healthy, and it's not until a high percentage of the cows are open at preg-check that trich is suspected. While

cows are usually able to clear the infection within a few months, females are occasionally longer-term carriers. Once bulls become infected, they will most likely remain carriers for the rest of their lives.

Importance of management

Trich has been reported in almost every state in the United States, but some areas of the country have a much higher risk of coming into contact with a trich-infected breeding animal than others. The movement of trich into a noninfected herd is through infected bulls or cows. Any time a lot of cattle are moving from one part of the country to another, such as during a drought situation, the risk of spreading trich to areas that did not previously have a lot of cases is very possible.

Many states have imposed regulations requiring testing for trich for bulls moved into their states, some states have testing requirements for bulls moving within the state, and a few states have regulations about the movement of open cows. Rules about which animals must be tested for trich before being allowed to cross the border vary between states; therefore, you must contact the state to which you are shipping cattle in order to meet those regulations. In addition, in many states trich is a reportable disease; therefore, if trich is diagnosed in a herd, the state veterinarian must be notified and will then start an investigation-and-control procedure.

Even though trich is a very important disease to the U.S. cattle industry, most herds are not infected, and many herds have a fairly low risk of becoming infected. Therefore, a trich-control plan for a noninfected herd would be very different than a plan for an infected herd. For noninfected herds, the goal is to set up a system in which it's unlikely that trich will be introduced from other herds. If you have a herd that is trich-infected, an aggressive plan to test the bulls and to carefully manage the breeding season must start immediately after diagnosis is confirmed.

Available tool

Trich CONSULT was designed for the beef industry as a free, user-friendly, online tool that helps cow-calf producers and veterinarians minimize the effects of trich in a herd that has been infected, and it can be used to design a system to keep trich out of uninfected herds. The plans that are developed are customized to each herd's specific situation through a series of questions and responses that is designed to mimic a conversation with a trich expert.

I'm a firm believer that one-size-fits-all trich plans will not work. It takes a knowledgeable veterinarian who knows trichomoniasis and who knows the

ranchers they are working with and their community to design the best individualized control and surveillance plans. The question-and-answer format of Trich CONSULT helps the cattle producer and veterinarian to cover all the important considerations when designing an eradication or prevention program.

Trich CONSULT is set up to provide different answers and follow-up questions based on previous answers. There are six to 10 questions in Trich CONSULT that should take about 10-20 minutes to complete, depending on each individual producer's answers. If you want more information about a particular question or answer, you can click on a "More Information icon" and get helpful feedback to help you make a decision that best fits your herd and management.

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The first question in Trich CONSULT is, "Do you have trichomoniasis in your herd?" The follow-up questions will be very different depending on whether you answer "yes" or "no" to that initial question. If you are not sure about your infection status, you will be asked several questions to determine whether or not it is likely that you have trich in your herd.

If you already have trich in your herd, you will be asked whether you can perform certain testing and management actions to find and remove potentially infected bulls and cows. Many of the suggested actions are very strongly recommended, while others are preferred, but if you are willing to accept some risk of continued trich exposure, the tool will provide advice about how to minimize those risks and establish a strategy to quickly respond if your risky decision resulted in negative consequences.

If you do not currently have trich in your herd and want to create a cost-effective strategy to maintain your trich-free status, you will be asked if you can implement several different barriers to allowing an infected cow or bull to come into contact with your herd. Again, some actions are very strongly recommended while other actions are preferred in order to have the lowest risk of disease. If you choose to continue some actions that have slight to moderate risk of

allowing trich into the herd, advice is provided in Trich CONSULT to manage your retained risk.

After you have completed all the questions in Trich CONSULT, a report will be generated that includes the answers to all the questions that you just completed and a summary of the strengths and limitations of your agreed-upon strategy.

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