

Potential Benefits for Statewide BVD Control Programs

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Veterinary organizations and producers have initiated efforts to address the economic and health impact of BVD virus on the nation's beef herd. Organizations such as the Academy of Veterinary Consultants and American Association of Bovine Practitioners have formulated position statements that address a commitment to BVD control and eradication. These position statements are lofty goals that require the industry to develop a unified approach to address BVD. Without a consistent approach in addressing control strategies the potential success of any BVD control program will be minimal. Attempts to implement similar programs, such as preconditioning programs, have met with only mixed success or complete failure. To avoid the same result with BVD control will require an approach that incorporates a third party verification component. If the industry adopts a consistent approach the playing field is leveled for all producers and everyone benefits through increased production and disease control.

Why establish a single control program?

The benefit of a statewide control program rests in consistency. If each veterinarian, rancher, pharmaceutical company, or breed association develops a BVD control program, the result will be that no one truly knows what measures of control have been implemented, and the disease status of an animal becomes uncertain. The producer is left without any method to evaluate the potential risk of buying a disease problem. A statewide control program provides a third party to verify that the program's elements are being followed. Third party verification is a key component if control programs are to be considered worthwhile. Once a consistent program with third party verification is developed, the producer can realize a financial benefit through offering his livestock for sale certifying the animals have met a minimum set of requirements, thereby allowing the purchaser to better predict the risk of owning the cattle. The potential of statewide control rests in the priority we wish to give BVD control and can only be determined through a process of continual critical review.

Who should administer BVD Control Programs?

Potential administrators for BVD Control Programs would include state/national cattle organizations, breed/livestock associations, universities, pharmaceutical/biological companies, and state or federal agencies. Each of these entities has positive and negative characteristics that would require consideration before producers would be willing to enter into any agreement with them.

Government involvement carries with it the same producer reservations of the brucellosis, tuberculosis, and animal I.D. program. On the other hand, when we in the cattle industry refuse to police ourselves then two possible outcomes arise, either we ignore the problem or someone will tell us what to do.

Pharmaceutical/biological companies in the past, currently and in the future will play a positive role in the health and well-being of our cattle. Vaccines and antibiotics are important components of disease management that are integral to producer success. Each of these companies have a vested interest in the success of the producer, however they are businesses that have to answer to a bottom line. When all is said and done, these interests may not be to the producer's benefit.

Universities could undoubtedly offer impartial third party verification to any program, however in today's society every university is stifled by budgets that hardly allow them to complete their mission in education and research let alone be able to afford the manpower and resources for administering a control program. The role that the universities might play in the program may be as a resource for information, evaluation and testing.

Breed and livestock associations offer the potential of being an unbiased third party that might administer a BVD control program. A fundamental mission of any livestock association is to serve its constituents by promoting their cattle and enhancing their member's success, a BVD control program certainly could serve this purpose. Yet, a limiting factor to administration of such programs by livestock associations is that not everyone is a member. Therefore, a population of cattle would exist that does not fall under the oversight of the administering agency.

The administration of a BVD control program may require a joint effort of multiple facets of the industry. The concept of a joint effort is not new but the individuality of the cattle industry and the formation of such a joint effort will offer a challenge.

What are the necessary components of BVD control?

Four components necessary for BVD control exist, education, biosecurity, diagnostics, and critical review of benefits. We currently struggle with BVD because of a lack of understanding of what the disease may cause and how the disease is transmitted. This apparent educational gap goes beyond the producer and is equally shared by the veterinary profession. The solution to this problem exists in the university system where through cooperative extension and professional education the producer and veterinarian can be kept abreast of the increasing scientific knowledge concerning BVD.

Implementation of an accepted biosecurity plan is an integral part of BVD control program. Biosecurity addresses herdsman'ship, vaccinations, record keeping, and planning. It is obvious that pharmaceutical and biological companies have an input to

this component of control while the practice of herdsmanship, record keeping, and planning could be addressed by the veterinary profession and livestock associations.

Testing is a necessary component of disease control, and because of the nature of the disease and the role the persistently infected animal plays in its spread we have a unique opportunity to bring BVD under control. By testing and eliminating the persistently infected animals from the cattle population, we can eliminate BVD from our herds. However, if I test and my neighbor does not, the full potential of my efforts may not be realized. In the past, a major stumbling block to BVD control has been the cost of testing. Recent developments will allow us to screen herds with a minimal cost and therefore lessen the aversion to testing. Currently available tests utilize tissue and blood samples, and no matter which test is selected all have some limitations and must be coupled with a strong educational base in order that efficient and accurate identification of BVD persistently infected animals can be made.

The last component of an effective control program is that the participants must be rewarded for their efforts. In initial phases of control, the rewards may come in the form of pricing advantage while in the later stages when control has been more fully accepted by the industry, rewards are more likely to be in the form of increased production. If BVD control does not provide a benefit to the producer, then there is little reason to continue to pursue any control program. In order to evaluate the benefits of control, we must critically review the outcomes of control programs through a continual evaluation of economic and production parameters.

How do we achieve the benefits of control?

The benefits of control can only be realized through a consistent program with third party verification that is founded in sound unbiased scientific knowledge. Colorado is the first state to address BVD control through a statewide program. This effort has been jointly addressed by the State of Colorado and Colorado State University. When producers were asked if they had received any benefit from the program, every one of them stated they had benefited. Some attributed the benefit to increased dollars for their calves and some through decreased illness in the herd. Like every livestock disease BVD costs the producer, and if it isn't present in a herd now it will be unless a control program is initiated.

Four Simple Steps to BVD Control

1. Test all your cattle for BVD persistent infections.
2. Vaccinate your cattle annually with a modified live vaccine.
3. Test all herd additions.
4. Test each year's calf crop.

Cut along dotted lines and save

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