

Spring Is Good Time To Vaccinate Heifers Against Brucellosis

FAYETTEVILLE, ARK.

If you have heifers that are between four and 12 months old and you're planning to keep them in your herd, the University of Arkansas Division of Agriculture recommends that you have them vaccinated against brucellosis, also called bangs, according to Dr. Jeremy Powell, extension veterinarian.

"Arkansas producers are no longer required to vaccinate their calves if they're going to sell them or keep them since the disease was eradicated in the state in 1997," Powell said. "But if you're going to keep them, it's a good, standard herd health practice to vaccinate them. It's totally voluntary."

"To keep our state class free, cattle producers should continue to vaccinate their cattle in order to keep their cattle from getting the disease," he said. "Vaccination is the most important tool in disease prevention. Texas, Wyoming and Idaho have had brucellosis outbreaks in recent years."

Powell said it's unlikely Arkansas will ever have a problem with brucellosis again, but vaccination is a good insurance and peace of mind for producers.

"It's not expensive," Powell said. "It's probably around \$3 to \$3.50 an animal if your veterinarian does it or free if an Arkansas Livestock Poultry Commission representative does it. It has to be done by a licensed vet or commission employee. It's a live vaccine and producers can't purchase it."

A vaccinated animal receives an ear tag and tattoo that identify it as having been vaccinated.

Van Banks, a Yell County extension agent, said brucellosis is a widespread contagious disease affecting animals and humans. The disease is spread by coming into direct contact with other infected animals, cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, camels, buffaloes or wild ruminants, deer or elk. It can also be spread through indirect contact by consuming contaminated food products, through breaks in the skin or by breathing contaminated air.

Brucellosis infection of cattle causes abortion or premature calving of recently infected animals, most often between the fifth and eighth month of pregnancy. Infected cows frequently suffer from retained afterbirth and are difficult to get re-bred and sometimes become sterile.

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