

Case Study

RESTOCKER HEIFER PESTIVIRUS BREAKDOWN

VETERINARIANS

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CASE REGION OF ORIGIN

Coolah, NSW

CASE BACKGROUND

The business operates as a cross bred breeding operation. Wagyu bulls are joined over Angus cows with F1 terminal progeny produced. No angus cows are bred on farm, all are purchased, ideally in large lines.

In 2020, a significant number of Angus heifers were purchased from four farms across southern Victoria to enter the program.

As there was a large weight variation within the purchased cattle, the heifers were first boxed and then drafted into several joining groups based on weight, with the goal of achieving critical mating weights in each group to enable a successful joining. The timing of calving within those groups was:

1. March/April Calvers

- Marked 296 of 334 heifers
- 50 tested positive as PIs + whatever had died before testing

2. May/June Calvers

- Marked 283 out of 317 heifers
- 2 tested positive as PIs

3. July/August Calvers

- Marked 101 out of 109 heifers
- 1 tested positive as PI

This case investigates a pestivirus outbreak within these restocker heifers, the resulting loss and financial impact.

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CASE INVESTIGATION

The farm manager first noticed dead and stillborn calves occurring in the weeks after the initial calving date, which triggered concern. Following this, two approximately 2-month-old weak calves were separated to raise as puddy's, however both died shortly after being taken into care. This prompted further action and a veterinary investigation, including diagnostics. Upon investigation it was confirmed that both of the deceased puddy calves were persistently infected (PI) with pestivirus.

Concern mounted that a pestivirus challenge had been faced at a critical time during the joining period and into the gestation period...this is likely to be a result of at least one of the purchased heifers being a PI animal herself.

Suspicion was confirmed with submission of diagnostics to the NSW Department of Primary Industries EMAI lab.

IMPACT

The pestivirus challenge and resulting impacts were significant for this business.

The biggest losses were in the initial joining and those that were affected had two chances subsequently to get back in calf.

By the time of the 2nd and 3rd joining most naïve animals had obviously been exposed to PIs. A total of about 55 live PIs were identified and significant deaths occurred within the PI animals, with losses ongoing.

The non-affected cohort were all sold for an average of \$3,000.

The pestivirus challenge resulted in:

- Higher than expected post preg. testing loss
- Increased still births and neonatal loss, resulting in reduced marking rate

- A significant number of PIs produced resulting in opportunity cost due to deaths and a reduced value of surviving calves
- Elevated risk of secondary disease

RECOMMENDATIONS

Consideration was given to testing incoming females to assess seroprevalence and the need for ongoing vaccination, but it was decided that would become complicated and it was easier to blanket vaccinate.

Going forward all females will receive x2 Pestigard vaccinations on arrival with annual boosters thereafter.

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