

Danger of spreading Bovine Brucellosis (BBR) via auctions and shows

This article will try and point out the dangers of how bovine brucellosis can be brought onto your farm unknowingly and infect your herd.

In an actual case the following happened:

“ In an area which is relatively free of BBR, one farmer with cattle of unknown brucellosis status spread BR to 5 farms after he sold some of his commercial cattle.....two of the farms were so infected as a result of the sale that the herds were slaughtered out.

In another outbreak, also in a commercial herd where the herd was tested negative in June after calving and all cattle sold at a dispersal sale held in Octoberfour herds got infected from that sale. One new owner had a stud which was completely separate and fortunately not infected. BBR has a very varied incubation period so there were obviously some animals that had become serologically positive after the test.

Presently there is a young vet (28 years) from the xxxx, where there has been no Brucellosis in years, in hospital in xxxx being treated for Brucellosishe can remember doing a caeser on a cow 2 months previous to onset of symptoms – but he cannot remember where the farm is or the farmer’s surname. This makes tracing the disease difficult. Hopefully when he gets out of hospital he will be able to check his records”.

Question: Our Show ruling is that all animals that come to the show must be tested for CA and TB. In respect of stud breeding cows, could they be BBR positive and transmit the disease?

Answer: Are these cows pregnant? If the cows are anything from 4 months pregnant and come from a herd of unknown BBR status, a negative serological test may not be sufficient. Brucellosis is a herd disease and these cows may be incubating the disease. Heifers/cows that have become infected may abort from 5 months pregnancy especially if never vaccinated. It is at this stage of pregnancy that the uterus starts producing the sugar erythritol that the field strain needs to grow and multiply. If newly tested and infected before this stage of pregnancy the heifers/cows normally test negative. Heifers born from infected cows can be infected in the uterus (latently infected) but only sero-convert from 5months pregnancy, but this sero-conversion may take much longer and only occur after abortion or calving.

Question: Would it be understandable to ask farmers that are bringing heifers or oxen to merely test the specific animal? I know the chances that a heifer or ox transmitting the disease is very rare.

Answer: Oxen cannot transmit the disease, and heifers, if not pregnant, are fine. If they come from a herd of unknown *Brucella* status, they should not be sold as they may be latently infected.

Question: I would like the rule to stay as, "All breeding animals coming to the show need to be tested for CA (Brucellosis) and TB".

Answer: If not pregnant, and no sale takes place they may be shown. However infected farms are under quarantine so no animal may be moved from the farm without the permission of the local State Vet, and under cover of a Red Cross permit. There are many cases where farmers have bought in infected cattle that were sero-negative and have suffered the consequences of buying in Brucellosis into their herds. Remember you do not pay stud prices for meat of cows slaughtered for Brucellosis – cross breed and a stud animal receive the same price.

Question: Some guys/exhibitors are trying to get it right that every animal on the farm should be tested before an animal is allowed on the show.

Answer: This is our ultimate aim with the BBR scheme – to find where the disease is so that we can control its spread.

Question: Please understand how this will drop our entry as well as create a logistical and administrative nightmare to monitor.

Answer: A vet who is also an attorney was asked the question about whose responsibility the animal at an auction is (and in your case it would be the show grounds) and was referred to Section 11 of the Animal Diseases Act: a manager of the ground (auction or show) will be responsible for any disease outbreak that may occur.

(1) Any owner or manager of land on which there are animals, and any owner in respect of animals, shall, whether or not such owner or manager has obtained advice regarding the health, or any certificate of fitness or health of the animals in terms of section 13 (1) (c) , from the director-

(a) take, with due observance of the provisions of this Act, all reasonable steps to prevent the infection of the animals with any animal disease, or parasite and the spreading thereof from the relevant land or animals, or which are necessary for the eradication of animal diseases and parasites on the land or in respect of the animals; and

(b) whenever such animals-

(i) have become or can reasonably be suspected of having become infected with any animal disease or parasite, apply in respect of such animals the prescribed treatment or any other treatment which may be deemed suitable and customary in the particular circumstances; and

(ii) have become or can reasonably be suspected of having become infected with any controlled animal disease, immediately report such incidence in the prescribed manner to the director.

Section 34 refers to vicarious liability, so if a sero-negative animal comes from an infected farm and the owner knows the farm is infected, he/she can be held liable.

Attached is a link to the copy of the Act

<http://www.nda.agric.za/vetweb/Legislation/Gov%20Gaz%20-%20Act%2035%20of%201984%20-%20Part%201.pdf>

Question: The types of animals coming to the show are:

Cows calved/with calf/in calf

A barren cow does not transmit the disease, a pregnant animal if infected and calves/aborts at the show ground can. In calf must come from a herd tested for brucellosis with negative results.

Bulls of all ages

Should be tested.

Heifers

Not pregnant or from a known negative herd

Oxen

Cannot transmit the disease

Farmers should want to “know their status” Brucellosis is not only a zoonotic disease, but also a disease which negatively effects the economy of a farming enterprise, and can cause financial ruin. Use a negative status as a status symbol – announce it at the show that these animals are from a negative TB and BBR herdit will get other farmers thinking about their status.

Brucellosis is an emotional diseaseI have cried with many farmers whose herds have become infected and seen years of sweat, toil planning and breeding being destroyed by this disease. I feel for them because Brucellosis is a disease that can be prevented and controlled. Don't let shows and auctions be a part of the problem in spreading disease.

When buying animals this Vendor awareness declaration can help you to minimize risk!

VENDOR AWARENESS DECLARATION FOR BOVINE BRUCELLOSIS

I hereby declare that I am the legal owner or authorised representative of the cattle on sale and am competent to make this declaration

1	The cattle for sale are clearly and permanently identified		Yes	No
2	The cattle for sale/slaughter were born on my farm		Yes	No
3	The farm has a closed herd policy i.e. I do not buy in cattle, rent out grazing or speculate with cattle		Yes	No
4	I practice bio-security on my farm to a level that is	Poor	Moderate	Good
5	I vaccinate my heifer calves against Bovine Brucellosis once between the ages of 4 – 8 months		Yes	No
6	In addition I vaccinate my cattle older than 8 months with RB51		Yes	No
7	I have all the cattle on my farm tested for Bovine Brucellosis		Yes (date)	No
8	My herd has been tested negative within the past year		Yes	No
9	I did not buy in cattle since my last negative brucellosis test		Yes	No
10	I/my vet investigates any abortions on my farm		Yes	No
11	To the best of my knowledge, my immediate neighbours and farms in my area are free of Bovine Brucellosis		Yes	No
12	I use a veterinarian to advise me on my cattle's herd health		Yes	No
13	The cattle handling facilities on my farm are	Poor	Average	Good

Note: Vaccination does not mean freedom from Bovine Brucellosis as cattle can still be carriers

Please attach the most recent *Brucella* blood test certificate

Owner or authorised representative:.....

Signature:.....

Date:.....

Contact detail:

Farm:

District:.....

Contact number:.....

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