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Could Your Bull Purchase Give You More Than You Bargained For?

Respondents to a Beef Magazine producer survey released just this past June were asked to list cattle diseases of most importance to them, as well as areas where USDA and state government should devote more resources for surveillance, testing and prevention. While the survey covered a host of topics of concern to cattle producers, the results of this portion are especially important when making decisions on where beef producers turn for their bull purchases.

Topping the list was cattle **persistently infected with bovine virus diarrhea (PI-BVD)** at 57% and herds with **brucellosis** infection second at 38%. Following closely behind, were **trichomoniasis (trich) and Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE)** both at 33%. **Tuberculosis (TB)**, at 30%, and **Johne's disease**, at 29%, rounded out the diseases of most concern. (Please note producers could give multiple answers.) What is striking about these answers is that many of these diseases are "purchased" with herd additions, and in many cases, purchased through bulls bought to service your cows.

Spitzer Ranch has not waited on state or federal government, but has taken a proactive position to reduce risks associated with all of these diseases. They have taken great efforts to assure you don't purchase disease when you make a genetic investment with a bull purchase from the Spitzer Ranch Program.

PI-BVD.

All calves (every bull they sell, their steer mates sold or sent to the feed lot and all their

sisters) are ear notched with the tissue sample sent to an IDEXX Laboratory using antigen capture ELISA (ACE) laboratory procedures to determine BVD persistent infection status. Any animal found positive is euthanized and buried. Since the only way an animal can become a PI is to become infected in the uterus, this eliminates ever selling a PI-BVD animal. Since they have been testing every calf for PI-BVD since 2001 almost the entire cow herd has now been “ear notched”.

Brucellosis.

Spitzer Ranch is Brucellosis Certified Free Herd No. 2226 and has been Certified Free since 1983. This is a federal/state certification program that requires testing of every animal over two years of age every year to maintain free status. Many seedstock herds do not do this, but rather only test the bulls they sell. Since brucellosis is a herd disease, an individual animal test is not the most certain way to assure you of buying a bull from a disease free herd.

Trichomoniasis.

This is a reproductive disease only transmitted from bull to cow or cow to bull at time of service, commonly called a venereal disease. The absolute most certain way to be assured you do not introduce trich into your herd is to buy guaranteed virgin bulls. Spitzer Ranch assures you that none of the bulls sold have ever been exposed to cows and are therefore trich free.

BSE.

While there are a few documented cases of spontaneous BSE around the world, the most common way BSE is introduced is by feeding ruminant brain or spinal cord material to cattle by way of certain animal derived by-product feeds. This practice has been banned in the United

States and Spitzer Ranch has never fed, and pledges to never feed, any such by-products.

Tuberculosis.

Spitzer Ranch is Accredited Tuberculosis Free Herd No. 58348 and has been accredited since 1983. This is another federal/state program that requires testing every animal over one year of age. Originally this test was mandated every year to maintain accreditation, but in recent years the requirement has been testing every other year. Much like brucellosis, tuberculosis is a herd disease and an individual animal test is not as certain of a way to assure you are buying a bull from a disease free herd.

Johne's disease.

Spitzer Ranch was the first beef herd in South Carolina to achieve Level 4 Status (Highest Level) in the South Carolina Voluntary Bovine Johne's Disease Control Program. They have been testing for Johne's disease for 12 years and have never found a Johne's disease infected animal in the herd. Since this disease has a very long incubation period, a negative test on a yearling bull is of little use to assuring you of no disease risk.

These practices are routine at Spitzer Ranch. Along with their rigorous biosecurity program and a state of the art vaccination schedule (available on request), they drastically reduce the risk of producers "purchasing" disease along with their industry leading genetic traits. The folks at Spitzer Ranch work extra hard to make sure you don't have to! Isn't that what you would expect your seedstock bull supplier to do?

Beef producers who are serious about being profitable in the cattle business should sign up to receive the popular Spitzer Ranch Newsletters. These Newsletters always provide current

Bull Test Performance Reports as well as educational tips, inspiration and insights into a wide variety of timely topics of interest to those cattlemen whose goal is making money. Just call 864/972-9140, write SPITZER RANCH, 1511 HWY 59, Fair Play, SC, 29643 or email spitzeranch@mindspring.com.

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