

Calfhood Vaccination

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After the USDA deemed Texas free from cattle brucellosis, many cattlemen and veterinarians felt that the brucellosis calfhood vaccination of heifer calves was no longer warranted. In reality, the decision not to vaccinate replacement heifers is now having repercussions during the drought. Not only does vaccination protect herds against brucellosis if it ever makes a comeback in Texas, it also eases the burden for ranchers that are in desperate need of moving cattle north in search of grazing. Several producers have found pasture and care or have sold their herd to a buyer in the other states only to find out that their cows must be vaccinated against brucellosis prior to entering the state of destination.

The brucellosis entry requirement can be satisfied by one of two ways, calfhood and adult vaccination. If the cows were not vaccinated prior to a year old, these animals must be “adult vaccinated” in order to enter. The Texas Animal Health Commission has made the decision to allow accredited veterinarians to perform adult vaccination but only with a negative brucellosis test. Also, adult vaccination is not without risk. Unlike calfhood vaccination performed when the heifer is between 4 and 12 months of age, inoculating adult animals may cause abortions in some instances and therefore this low level of risk should be discussed between the veterinarian and client.

The cattle industry’s success is dependent on a multitude of variables such as commodity prices, weather, and location. Ensuring interstate marketability of both calves and adult animals is essential for an operation to be profitable. No one knows what the future will bring so all producers need to prepare for changes in disease status, grazing conditions, and marketing opportunities. Continuing to calfhood vaccinate replacement heifers will not only allow the cattleman to take advantage of trading avenues but also will protect the herd if brucellosis ever makes a comeback.

