

IMPACT

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Fort Hall trichomoniasis program reduces prevalence of serious cattle disease

The Situation

In the early 1990s, Fort Hall cattle producers began experiencing problems with trichomoniasis, a serious sexually transmitted disease of cattle. Trichomoniasis is caused by a protozoa that is found in the genital tract. It causes infertility and early abortions. Furthermore, trichomoniasis can result in repeat breeding cycles and extended calving intervals. The disease is transmitted by intact males during breeding. Females can also become carriers of the disease. Trichomoniasis can reduce a calf crop by as much as 50%. For example, a fall weaned steer calf weighing 650 lbs may bring \$.92/lb. for a value of \$598.00. Average herd size on the Reservation is 150 head, 50% of 150 = 75. Seventy-five calves valued at \$598.00 = a loss of \$44,850.00. Calf crop losses of this magnitude can put producers out of business.

Past extension programs were developed to educate producers and develop and implement a testing program for Reservation range bulls. From 1990 to 1999, the Reservation averaged approximately 8 trichomoniasis positive bulls per year. Through these years a total of 82 bulls tested positive. This high number of positive bulls had a tremendous negative impact on herd productivity and overall ranch profitability. Something needed to be done quickly to remedy the situation and make cattle production on the Reservation sustainable.

Our Response

In 2000, with Fort Hall Business Council (FHBC) and producer approval, the extension program developed more stringent programming and protocols for testing and monitoring for trichomoniasis. We asked that producers test all bulls for trichomoniasis a minimum of one time and consider pregnancy testing cows. It was also recommended that cows without calves for



Fort Hall Bull Grading Committee and Extension Educator Evaluate Bulls for Trichomoniasis Tags and Soundness. Diana Yupe photo

an unknown reason stay off of rangeland. These recommendations were made to eliminate any possibly infected cows.

In 2007, through diligent testing, we discovered two trichomoniasis positive bulls. Extension immediately developed materials for distribution to beef producers, the FHBC, the Tribal Land Use Policy Commission, tribal departments, and news media. Public meetings were coordinated with local and state veterinarians and producers to determine actions to solve this problem. More frequent and rigorous testing procedures were established for the affected range unit and adjacent areas where other cattle could have come in contact with infected animals. The trichomoniasis protozoa can be missed on the first test. For this reason, bulls in affected areas were tested three times. A protocol was established to require all tests for range bulls be submitted for evaluation to the extension office. Extension, Tribal Range,

and Tribal Fish and Game departments then examined all range bulls for trichomoniasis tags prior to entering range units. Trichomoniasis tags are placed in the bull's left ear to indicate the bull was tested and found negative by an approved veterinarian.

Program Outcomes

Through these collaborative efforts, we reduced the incidence of positive bulls to nearly 0 from 2000 to 2007. No positive bulls were found in 2008 and 2009. We expect to maintain this current status. This program has been very effective. It has made a substantial difference to program participants by eliminating any positive bulls from cattle herds running on the Reservation. Most Tribal producers now utilize pregnancy checking to eliminate any non-pregnant females from the herd that could potentially be infected with trichomoniasis. All producers test their bulls. Extension, producers, and other tribal departments monitor testing protocols continuously.

Five main outcomes resulted from the program:

- Producers were educated on the disease and implemented recommended procedures to reduce the incidence of positive bulls.
- The incidence of trichomoniasis positive bulls was reduced to zero.
- Calving seasons were tightened.
- Overall herd pregnancy rates were increased.
- More revenue was generated from improved management practices to make ranching operations more sustainable.

The Future

An effective vaccine for trichomoniasis does not exist for male or female cattle. For that reason, the trichomoniasis program must continue. It has proven to be an essential program to maintain the health and viability of Reservation cattle herds.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

Unit III Stockmen's Association
Local Tribal and non Tribal Producers
Fort Hall Land Use Policy Commission
Fort Hall Tribal Business Council
Fort Hall Range Department
Fort Hall Fish and Game Department
Idaho State Department of Agriculture

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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