"Bovine Respiratory Disease (or BRD) is the most common and costly disease affecting the North American beef cattle industry" reports the California Beef Cattle Research Council. While this may be shocking to some producers, it is important to be proactive to ensure that the impact of BRD in your herd is kept to a minimum. Many producers may think that BRD is only an issue in weaned calves, but studies show that BRD can have a negative impact at a much earlier age as well. This week we will look at the economic impact that BRD can have on pre-weaned calves and discuss factors that affect the susceptibility of calves to this disease.

It has been found that about 20% of ranches will experience some type of BRD incidence in their pre-weaned calves. Because of this, total losses on ranches due to BRD in the U.S. total $200-$300 million per year, or $35-$50 per cow in affected herds. This emphasizes the importance of knowing what may trigger BRD outbreaks, and how to prevent them in your herd. Outbreaks of BRD in pre-weaned calves most often occur in two age groups. Some outbreaks occur when the calves are between 20-30 days of age. This is likely due to a failure of proper passive transfer of immunity from the dam to the calf. More outbreaks are common when the calf is around 120 days old. This is the time in which the calf has lost its passive immunity from the dam, and the calf's active immune system is not yet fully developed.

In a large survey of over 2000 cow-calf producers in the U.S., researchers found that detection of BRD in pre-weaned calves was more prevalent in operations with large herd sizes, operations where BRD had been detected in the adult cows, and in operations where calves had diarrhea. In operations where BRD was being treated in pre-weaned calves, researchers found that the producers were also calving their cows in the winter, introducing calves from an outside source, and/or offering a supplemental feed to the calves. Previous studies find that other factors may also have a role in the occurrence of BRD in an operation. Location of the calf on the operation can impact this, as some areas on the ranch may provide access to more harmful pathogens. The gender of the calf is also noteworthy, as male calves often seem to be more likely to have BRD than females. And lastly, the age of the dam has an impact, as calves born to heifer dams are more likely to have BRD than calves born to older dams.

BRD is not just an issue in calves that have been weaned. Knowing the factors associated with BRD in pre-weaned calves is imperative in formulating a plan for prevention. If you have any questions about prevention or treatment of BRD in pre-weaned calves, please contact us. Visit this link for more on this topic: http://www.cattlenetwork.com/news/industry/brd-pre-weaned-calves

Thanks,
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