

The Pneumonia Menace

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With variable weather alternating between rain, some sharp winds, and chillier temperatures, an increase in pneumonia may be observed. It certainly does seem to be a seasonal illness ushered in by the changing weather and winds. Another way to have pneumonia occur in a herd, independent of season, is by bringing cattle together from different sources (shipping fever).

In any event, it usually starts with a virus (IBR, PI3, BRSV) that allows secondary bacteria to take hold deep in the lungs. The result is coughing calves, heifers and/or cows. Usually the worst animal catches the farmer's attention and then calls for a physical examination. Symptoms other than coughing that are easily observed are wet rings around the eyes with the eyes themselves appearing slightly reddened in general--this is when only a virus is affecting the animal. Some animals may also show very small blisters at the bottom outside edge of the nostrils, and occasionally white plaques may be seen within the nostrils if IBR is the cause (however it is rare to see such blisters or plaques). Eventually a muco-purulent (pus) discharge will be seen from the eyes and nostrils as the bacterial stage sets in.

There will typically be other animals in the group coughing, but they remain bright, alert and keep on eating. Checking the lung sounds and temperatures is critical in order to decide how best to treat them. Within a group of animals will be a variety of temperatures, lung sounds and display of general illness, depending on the stress level - the worst affected are usually recently weaned, poor body condition, parasitized and/or just fresh from calving. Lung sounds can range from slightly raspy to harsh friction rubs, worsening to fluid sounds/abscesses, and terminating in only hearing wind pipe sounds in certain lung areas (when consolidated and no longer functional).

Animals generally keep on eating with only mild to harsh sounds if the fever isn't too high. If no action is taken, each animal will become ill to various degrees and this will also depend on how virulent the viral or bacterial strain that is involved. If all pneumonia is contained to the viral stage only, the situation isn't too bad--however, it almost always degenerates to the bacterial stage, which can easily lead to death if left un-checked. A cow that is terminal (near death) will often be heard grunting with every breath. If this is heard, the animal will usually die within a few

hours.

This past November and December, I've had many farmers calling with animals of all ages sick with pneumonia, both on organic and conventional farms. No matter which type of farm is experiencing a pneumonia outbreak, the sickest animal will usually end up dying since it is too far advanced in the disease process by the time treatment is started.

On organic farms, the treatment relies on non-synthetic measures, namely boosting the immune system in as many ways possible and using plant medicines with known anti-bacterial constituents (ingredients). However, according to federal law, organic farmers cannot withhold non-synthetic/prohibited treatments in order to keep an animal "organic".

"The producer of an organic livestock operation must not withhold medical treatment from a sick animal in an effort to preserve its organic status. All appropriate medications must be used to restore an animal to health when methods acceptable to organic production fail. Livestock treated with a prohibited substance must be clearly identified and shall not be sold, labeled, or represented as organically produced" - 7CFR §205.238 (c) (7); USDA National Organic Program, Livestock health care practice standard.

Thus, it is illegal to withhold appropriate medication just to keep an animal "organic". Of course this makes my life more interesting and challenging, especially when faced with a disease like pneumonia that can easily kill animals if not treated with antibiotics.

The treatment I have come to prefer for organic cows with pneumonia is the following initial, one-time treatment:

- Intra-nasal IBR/PI3 vaccine (TSV-2™ or Nasalgen™) to stimulate immunity along the respiratory tract.
- Immunoboost™ (Vetrepharm), 5cc (cow), 1-3 cc (calf-heifer) in muscle, under skin or in vein.
- Vitamin A, D & E in muscle (10cc)

Passive antibodies (Bo-Bac-2X™ or Quatracon-2X™) in vein or under skin.

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This is to be accompanied and followed up with:

- 1-5 cc Aconite tincture (homeopathic mother tincture) every few hours for 1-2 days for animals with high fevers.

10-20 cc ‘Antibiotic’ tincture (garlic, goldenseal, echinacea, wild indigo, barberry) 3 times daily for 4 days.

This treatment has been successful, except in the worst cases, which if not yet having consolidated lung sounds, can still be treated with a conventional antibiotic in a day or two. Yes, this treatment plan is labor intensive, but that is sometimes the trade-off when not relying on synthetic treatments. One thing to point out is that if an animal has a second serious problem at the same time that it has pneumonia (bad uterus/metritis or parasitized), go directly to the conventional antibiotic route. This is said because the animal is so low in vitality that it simply cannot stave off an attack on two fronts without seriously strong measures. However, for any group of animals eating well, with a very slight, light, dry cough, simply using homeopathic BUB (bryonia, urtica, belladonna) is always handy.

To prevent pneumonia in the first place:

have young calves in hutches in the fresh air, allow animals fresh air at nose level but no drafts at floor level, keep box pens and group areas dry and bedded (no spongy areas), vaccinate stock with the intranasal vaccine 1-3 weeks before shipping.

With roughly 100 animals on 5 separate organic farms treated with natural means, we only reverted to conventional antibiotics on four animals (2 heifers and 2 cows). Two other cows died using natural treatments (both fresh and one had a bad uterus also). In the old

days previous to modern antibiotics, pneumonia killed or left many animals useless. By using a multi-prong approach with natural treatments, the results are not too far different than with antibiotics. The key is to jump on the problem quickly before irreversible changes take place.

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Dr. Hubert Karreman’s new book, Treating Dairy Cows Naturally: Thoughts and Strategies, will soon be published by Paradise Publications, Paradise, PA. The book combines medicines from the pre-antibiotic era and holistic treatments commonly used in the present, both mixed with clinical judgment. Part one lays the ground for the holistic dairy farming paradigm (along with challenges); the second part describes clinical conditions and their treatments in detail. Generic conventional treatments are mentioned in passing, in case the need to use them arises. A large Resource Contact list is provided so farmers can further delve into associated topics.

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