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Going North

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Are you thinking about or have you already expanded your herd by purchasing cattle from drought stricken Texas, Oklahoma or other neighboring states? Although the current low prices may be tempting, there are some animal health and management issues you should consider. These cattle will require a Certificate of Veterinary Inspection (aka Health Certificate) in order to enter Iowa. Cows will need to meet the tuberculosis and brucellosis requirements for Iowa. If purchased cattle originate from non-TB free areas (such as some areas of New Mexico) additional testing may be required. For specific health requirements governing the admission of cattle to Iowa, contact the Animal Industry Bureau (<http://www.agriculture.state.ia.us/animalIndustry/cattleAdmissionReqs.asp>).

There are additional important animal health diseases that you should be aware even if there are not specific state regulations for import. Introduction of diseases from co-mingling newly purchased cows with the resident herd is a common mechanism of disease transmission. At a minimum, newly purchased cows should not be co-mingled with resident cows (especially if they are pregnant) for 30 to 60 days. Since a biosecurity plan protect the health of your herd is an important part of your overall herd health plan, speak with your veterinarian if you have not yet developed one. Upon arrival, any cows with signs of disease should be examined by your veterinarian and may need to be culled before it affects resident cows., It is also a good idea to have your veterinarian examine all cows with less than a 3 body condition score (BCS) to determine that the low BCS is only due to lack of nutrition.

Trichomoniasis is a sexually transmitted protozoal disease carried by bulls that causes infertility and early abortions. Cows are infected during breeding and the resulting infection causes embryo death. Infected cows will remain infertile until they clear the infection. Trich infection can be difficult to detect in infected animals and cow-calf producers should exercise caution when considering importing non-virgin bulls or open cows into Iowa, especially from any state west of Iowa where the disease is currently more prevalent. Even if previously infected with trich, most pregnant cows have managed to clear the infection and should not be a source of trich infection to the resident herd. However, about 1% of infected cows will maintain a pregnancy and remain a carrier. Since trich is more prevalent in some drought stricken states, be especially careful when co-mingling these cows with your resident cow herd. Monitoring pregnancy rates is always a good management tool and provides valuable information to the producer and data obtained for 2-3 years after introducing new cows to your herd is especially helpful to assure that trich or another reproductive limiting disease has not been introduced into your herd.

Another infectious disease of economic importance is Bovine Viral Diarrhea (BVD). Our biggest concern would be calves that are born persistently infected with the virus. If not removed from the herd persistently infected calves will infect the next calf crop during the breeding season. There is not a practical method to test pregnant cows to determine if she is carrying a persistently infected calf. All calves born from purchased cows should be tested for BVD shortly after birth and prior to the next breeding season. The ISU Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory can determine if a calf is persistently infected with special testing on an ear notch. Contact your veterinarian about the best protocol for collecting and submitting samples. Do not co-mingle these purchased cows and their calves with your herd until the calves have been tested for BVD.

Without a vaccination history, pregnant cows should receive a killed viral vaccine this fall and discuss with your veterinarian the appropriate calf diarrhea vaccine. After the cows calve and before breeding discuss a modified live viral breeding vaccine program with your veterinarian.

Many purchased southern cows will be bred to calve this fall. That means that they are approaching or already in the third trimester of gestation. This is when almost 80% of fetal growth occurs. If cows have been nutritionally stressed during this time the calf may be negatively affected. Weak calf syndrome

can be associated with poor nutritional quality months before calving. Pregnant cows in the third trimester should be consuming 2 lbs of protein from all sources and 11 Mcal of energy per day. This can vary depending on the size and condition of the cow so be sure to work you're your nutritionist. Additionally, these cows have probably been receiving inadequate levels of minerals and vitamins. A solid vitamin and mineral supplementation program should be instituted as soon as possible after purchase. Liver biopsies can be used to determine body stores of many trace minerals.

Finally, cattle purchased from drought stricken areas will need time to acclimate to Iowa winters. A cow with more than 25% Brahman influence (visible Brahman characteristics such as long ear or hump) will not thrive in Iowa's colder climate. I would recommend caution when considering purchasing and importing southern cattle into Iowa after the first of October. It is common to hear that southern cattle do not fully acclimate until their second winter. There may be some "memory" in the amount of hair growth and fat deposition each year in preparation for winter and cattle may acclimate based on their last winter. Or, perhaps we do a better job with these cows the second year because first year was so tough on them. Be prepared to provide additional feed to these cows this fall to prepare them for winter. Many of these cows will already be thin and will need 1 or 2 body condition scores (BCS) just to survive. I recommend feeding these cows to a BCS of at least 6 this fall to make sure they have enough fat cover to withstand the winter. It would also be advisable to provide some shelter for these cows this winter. And, they shouldn't be expected to know how to find food underneath snow.

Although, purchasing cows from drought stricken areas may initially appear to be a good deal, make sure you think through all aspects of the proposition. Discuss animal health issues with your veterinarian. Contact your beef extension specialist or a nutritionist to develop a good feeding program that meets their needs (remember you will have a lot of ground to make up) and determine if it will be cost effective. In some cases, it may be more profitable in the long run to build your herd by purchasing local cows in good condition.