



BISON HEALTH

Accurate Pregnancy Test Affects the Bottom Line

by Laurie Dineen

The age old question of livestock producers is—"Is She or Isn't She"—bred, that is. The bottom line of every livestock production operation is having a cow that conceives and calves successfully, year after year. Veterinarians have been called in to help assist in the early detection of pregnancy in order to help producers narrow their margins and cull out open cows. Feeding an open cow all winter can be very costly to a producer, and when there is more than one it will affect the bottom line—staying in business.

The typical method of pregnancy testing is by rectal palpation done by a veterinarian. For bison producers this can be a challenge in many ways. Finding a veterinarian that is willing to do a rectal palpation is the first. With the elevated level of excitement of a bison cow in the chute, this can be a very risky position for a veterinarian. The term of pregnancy at the time of the exam can also be a factor. Many producers have found that if palpation is done in the first trimester (40-45 days), it can lead to abortions, which is also costly to the producer.

BioTracking, LLC, a company based in Moscow, Idaho has developed BioPRYN, a blood pregnancy test for ruminants. The name is a partial acronym for "Pregnant Ruminant Yes/No." The BioPRYN technology works only on ruminants. The test evaluates the serum of ruminants for a protein called Pregnancy Specific Protein B (PSPB), which is produced by the binucleated cells of the placenta. These cells leave the placenta and enter the uterus, break apart, and deliver PSPB to the maternal circulation. This allows identification of pregnancy by testing for the presence of the PSPB. Using an enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) technology the lab can determine pregnancy by 40 days or later after breeding.

Dr. Ken Throlson, DVM in New Rockford, North Dakota has used BioPRYN testing off and on over the years in various aspects of his bison operation. He believes that using a blood test to determine pregnancy offers many benefits. As a veterinarian, Doc Ken knows from experience the risks and wear and tear that rectal palpation puts on a veterinarian. "Pulling a blood sample from a cow is less intrusive and less upsetting to the cow," according to Doc Ken. "It also takes the guess work out of what the vet actually can detect from a rectal palpation, giving the owner a more accurate reading."

"Rectal palpation done at 45-80 days gestation can be

risky and has been known to stimulate abortions of the fetus. I have always recommended that preg tests be done after 90 days to help eliminate some of this," said Doc Ken.

Using the BioPRYN blood test, Doc Ken better manages his breeding program. He has been able to cull open cows earlier, the cows experience fewer abortions, and he has a recorded blood sample which builds confidence in buyers. It is also much easier on him to pull a blood sample than to do a rectal palpation. "The cows are quieter and less apt to put up a fight allowing the rest of the testing to go quicker and smoother." He continued, "I also believe for many ranchers it will be easier to get a vet to bleed the buffalo than it is to find one to rectal palpate them." Doc Ken has been happy with the quality of the lab and the results and BioTracking has been good to work with. "I would recommend this technology to others to incorporate into their programs," he said.

The uses of BioPRYN technology have been beneficial to more than the livestock industry. The USGS - Northern Rocky Mountain Science Center, Montana State University has been using BioPRYN technology in various research projects

including live captive bison in Yellowstone National Park. Dr. Peter Gogan, USGS, shared how they have been using this technology successfully to determine reproductive status of bison cows and the relationship to issues in the Yellowstone bison.

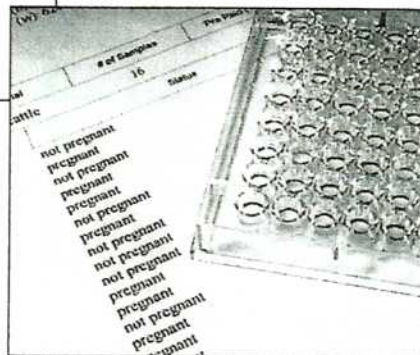
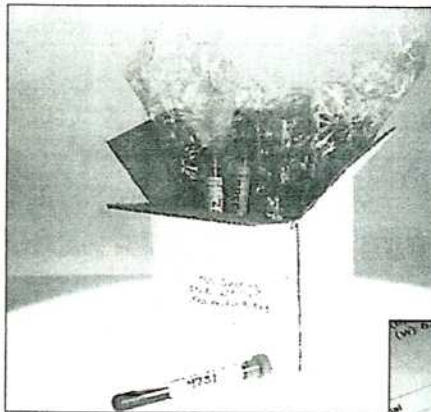
"The relationship of the pregnancy rates of

the bison and Brucellosis help us project the growth rates of the bison herd," said Dr. Gogan. "We can pull blood more easily and we don't need a qualified person to palpate." They have used the BioPRYN tests intermittently since their study began in 1997. "The BioPRYN test works well for our situation and the accuracy has been very good with the bison and the elk," Gogan commented.

There are two distinct herds of bison in Yellowstone: the Hayden-Pelican Valleys and the Northern Range, Gogan explained. "Some of the animals within the herds interchange, but the terrain limits this for the most part," Gogan said. The information collected on pregnancy rates is put into a population model to predict growth rates of the herds which currently number approximately 4,000.

Is BioPRYN testing right for you? Producers need to weigh the pros and cons based on their operation. The test requires

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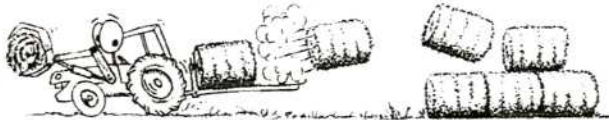


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Nov 26: MN Buffalo Assoc. Legends of the Fall Show and Sale, Albany, MN

Dec 3: Western Bison Assoc. Wild West Buffalo Stampede Show and Sale, Ogden, UT

Dec 10: North Dakota Buffalo Assoc. Annual Fall Auction, Mandan, ND

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Jan 21: National Bison Assoc. Gold Trophy Show and Sale, Denver, CO

Jan 29: Dakota Territory Buffalo Assoc. Black Hills Buffalo Classic Show and Sale, Rapid City, SD

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27 hours once the blood is received by the lab and results can be faxed or emailed back to the producer. Producers can expect to incur approximately the same or less cost using BioPRYN compared to rectal palpation by a veterinarian. Every operation is different and all options must be taken into consideration before knowing if a technology such as BioPRYN would work for you.

To learn more about BioPRYN contact Dr. Garth Sasser at BioTracking, LLC. 208/882-9736 or view the company's website at www.biotracking.com

EDITOR'S NOTE: *BioTracking has been advertising their services to bison producers for several years. I never realized what they really offered to producers until recently when I called and asked more questions. I found that they do offer a unique and reputable service that may be of interest to many of our readers.* ♡



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