SUCCESS DEPENDS ON THE WELL-BEING OF OUR BULLS

Commitment to animal care, biosecurity, disease testing and traceability helps Semex raise the bar on animal health.

The health and welfare of our bulls is a top priority for Semex and is every employee’s shared responsibility.

“Animal health and welfare and disease monitoring is not only important for the animal, but it’s vital for the quality of our semen, our business, Canada’s disease status and the confidence of our global trading partners,” says Susan Dunk, Semex’s Director of Customer Service and Regulatory Affairs.

Young bulls typically enter Semex’s bull roster at four to six months of age. “The farmers we collaborate with understand the importance of bull health,” says Dunk who notes it’s critical to keep bulls healthy before they enter the company’s Brockville, Ontario, isolation facility. It’s here where Semex, under the guidance of the Isolation Specialist Veterinarian, follows stringent health protocols set out by the Canadian A.I. Program to protect animal health.

Under the Canadian A.I. Program, managed by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA), bulls go through a series of tests aimed at preventing disease transmission via bovine semen. This begins on-farm, 60 days prior to entering the Semex facility, bulls are tested for nine diseases, including: Tuberculosis, Brucellosis, Leptospirosis, Bluetongue, Johne’s, Leucosis, IBR, BVD and EHD2. All tests are completed by CFIA laboratories.

Upon entering the Brockville facility, the animals are retested for the diseases as well as Campylobacter and Trichomoniasis – bringing the total number of diseases tested to 11. Bulls failing health tests cannot access Semex semen production centres. This screening process gives Semex bulls the highest health status among animal populations in Canada.

EXCEEDING CANADIAN AND GLOBAL STANDARDS

Monitoring for health and disease doesn’t stop there. All 11 diseases are included in annual testing, with seven being tested again semi-annually, and Bluetongue and EHD2 every 30 days. Dunk adds that some countries require special testing for Q Fever.

“As you can see, we take disease very seriously. Our goal is to exceed Canadian and industry standards,” says Dunk. She notes that bulls entering the A.I. centres from Progenesis, Semex’s internal...
product development program, are subject to the same testing procedures.

Maintaining bull health relies on much more than just testing for disease. On-going commitments to animal care, biosecurity and traceability play an important role. “Preventing diseases from entering our semen production centres is a major component of our biosecurity plan,” Dunk says.

For example, when bulls are picked up on-farm from genetic suppliers, Semex hires a dedicated trucking firm that sanitizes trucks before each trip. Biosecurity protocols are followed to ensure disease does not enter the A.I. centre. The protocols also encompass the bull management team, including veterinarians who follow strict access and sanitation rules.

**KEEPING BULLS HEALTHY AND COMFORTABLE**

Dunk emphasizes the importance of how the Brockville facility is constructed to support and enhance health management. The A.I. centre isolation facility consists of two barns, each containing 12 independent pods.

“Every pod has its own ventilation system and washing facility. All the equipment in each pod stays there, including feed wagons,” explains Dunk. This level of biosecurity gives Semex the ability to isolate any animal within a small group without compromising the health status of the animals at the centre.

Semex often gets questions from producers and government regulators regarding animal welfare and how bulls are managed within the facility. “It’s important for people to understand that our bulls get a high level of care. Dedicated specialized staff, overseen by centre and corporate veterinarians, observe our bulls daily not only to look for any sign of suspicious disease but also to look for any possible improvement of the comfort of our bulls,” she says. For example, some bulls will frequently get ‘sauna like’ sessions under heating lamps to relax their back muscles. “It’s good for the animal to keep them healthy and comfortable.”

When bulls are out of their pens, they are washed, brushed and clipped. Feed rations and feeding regimen are also an important health consideration, that is monitored by the Semex Corporate Veterinarian and the centre veterinarian team.

Traceability is the final piece that completes the bull health puzzle. Using RFID technology, Semex is able to trace all aspects of disease management and animal health. “It really does allow us to show customers that our processes meet and exceed global requirements,” says Dunk.

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