

Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

BLACKLEG VACCINATION FOR CATTLE ENCOURAGED

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The Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Belize Agriculture Health Authority inform all cattle farmers that Blackleg disease is in the increase in cattle. Given the recent floods, more cattle may be exposed to the disease, hence it is advised that farmers vaccinate their cattle against Blackleg, if they have not recently done so. Blackleg does not affect humans.

Blackleg is a highly fatal disease of young cattle caused by the spore forming, rod shaped, gas producing bacteria *Clostridium chauvoei*. The spores of the organism can live in the soil for many years. The first sign observed is usually lameness, loss of appetite, rapid breathing and the animal is usually depressed and has a high fever. Characteristic swellings develop in the hip, shoulder, or elsewhere. First the swelling is small, hot and painful.

As the disease progresses, the swelling enlarges and becomes spongy and gaseous. If you press the swelling, gas can be felt under the skin. The animal usually dies in 12 to 48 hours. In most cases the animal is found dead without being previously observed sick. The speed with which blackleg kills usually makes individual treatment useless.

Blackleg is almost entirely preventable by vaccination. The most commonly used clostridial vaccination in cattle is the 7-way type which protects against seven types of *Clostridia* organisms. Farmers are encouraged to use the seven-way Blackleg vaccine available at most farm supply stores. Unregistered vaccines and vaccines not available for sale in Belize are not to be used.

Additional information can be obtained from livestock officers of the Department of Agriculture in the districts, BAHA animal health officers and registered veterinarians.