

**Report of Unexplained Deaths of Three Cows and a Bull Calf Near
Valparaiso, Nebraska, April 5 & 7, 2003:
Veterinarian Necropsy Summary Report and Photographs**

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Two registered black Simmental cows and a 250 pound bull calf were found dead by their owner at 7:00 AM April 5th, 2003, approximately 13.5 hours after last seeing them alive. The events occurred in a 10-acre pasture that adjoins the rancher's dwelling place, located near Valparaiso Nebraska. A veterinarian was called and by 8:30 AM the same morning began performing a necropsy on the animals. The necropsy report will be appended.

According to the veterinarian, cow #105 was found in sternal recumbency with no tissues removed. The rancher noted that the area between the vulva and the rectum had been either cut with a sharp instrument or had burst. Upon opening the mouth of cow #105, the veterinarian noted the tongue, upper buccal cavity and the throat of the animal appeared to be blackened or charred with some blistering. The second animal (#237) was lying lateral recumbency with one of the teats gone and a circular 4-inch diameter incision appeared to have been made. The mouth and tongue of animal #237 were also charred and blackened.

During the necropsy that began about 15 hours after the animals were last seen alive and in spite of the cool temperatures that night (30-35F), the veterinarian noticed surprisingly advanced autolysis in the internal organs and throughout both animals. There appeared to be substantial hemorrhaging and particularly advanced autolysis in the rib cage area of both animals. The veterinarian noted that the degree of decomposition of both animals appeared more in keeping with several days lying during the summer. The rancher insisted that since it was calving season, he had counted all animals carefully at 17.30 hours the previous evening. The veterinarian gave no reason for the rapid rate of decomposition of both animals.

The 250-pound bull calf, #319, in contrast, displayed no signs of either autolysis or rigor mortis during the necropsy. The owner noticed the flesh was pink and healthy and the animal had no blood, although the veterinarian disputed the rancher's description of "no blood". There was no sign of blackening in or around the calf's mouth. The calf's testicles had been removed leaving a 4-inch diameter hole. The anus appeared to have been cored out, the tail was gone and about ten pounds of meat had been cut from the

calf's hind-quarters. During the necropsy, a highway patrol man arrived, a sheriff's deputy from Wahoo Nebraska, as well two workers with the Game and Parks service, one of whom had extensive experience in investigating and appraising predator damage to livestock. During subsequent interviews all officials that were present agreed that a sharp instrument had been used to remove the meat from the hindquarters, the testicles and the anus from the bull calf.

Two days later, on the morning of April 7, 2003 following a snowstorm that deposited about six inches of snow on the ground, another cow (#8) was found dead in the same pasture. The same veterinarian was called to conduct a necropsy. In yet another variation on the modus operandi of the killings, knife marks were found near the animal's teat which was intact but partially removed. No blackening was noted around the animal's mouth or tongue, but a bite shaped wound was apparent in the roof of the animal's mouth as well as on the tongue, consistent with, according to the veterinarian the animal biting down hard. The animal was found dead in eight inches of mud, about 70 feet from the roadway. The owner and local law enforcement noticed both fresh vehicle tracks in the snow, as well three separate sets of footprints in the snow.

A variety of tissue samples were sampled during the necropsies and were sent to the University Nebraska Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources. As of the time of writing this preliminary summary of the case, an analysis for excess lead the blood from one of the animals was negative. More tests are believed to be pending.

Photographs



Photo 1. Animal #105 lying in sternal recumbency. According to the veterinarian, this was an unusual posture for the animal to adopt at death.



Photo 2. The teat from animal #237 was removed in a circular incision.



Photo 3. Testicles, anus, tail and rear flank meat was removed from calf #319.



Photo 4. The tongue and mouth of two animals were blackened, hardened or charred.



Photo 5. Hemorrhaging, “cooking” or advanced autolysis was evident under the hide of the animal when the hide was removed during necropsy. All animals had received four separate doses of 7-way vaccine during their lifetimes, so blackleg is unlikely to account for these lesions. The veterinarian agreed.