

Calf necropsy

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Abstract

This presentation will cover how to perform necropsy on neonatal cattle, give practice tips on performing necropsies, and how to make calf necropsies a value-added service.

When to perform a necropsy

Necropsies on a farm are done for many different reasons – in the face of a disease outbreak, when a farm is facing increased morbidity or mortality, to decide when to make vaccination or treatment protocol changes, or in the face of management changes. Necropsying calves should be done frequently and can be a tool for any practitioner.

What tools are needed to perform a necropsy

A calf necropsy does not require as much equipment as an adult bovine necropsy. A sharp knife is sufficient to open up and take all samples necessary to find out what killed a calf. A person will also need a permanent marker, sample bags and wide mouth jars to be able to collect appropriate samples.

Performing a necropsy

Before starting a calf necropsy, one needs to observe the animal. What does the calf look like? Observation of location, position, and body condition score should all be recorded. Look for signs of external trauma. Every necropsy a person does should be performed in the same manner. Start with the calf laying

on the same side and look at all internal organs; consistency is key so that nothing is overlooked. Look for signs of infection, trauma, nutritional status, and disease. After taking in visual observation, one has to decide what diagnostic samples to take. These samples include liver, lung, kidney, intestines, abnormal tissue and any tissues that reflect clinical signs. Kansas State University has a very helpful checklist that a new practitioner can reference when performing a necropsy.

Necropsy: a value-added service

Necropsies can not only get a new veterinarian on farm, but they can also help to guide management changes. Calf necropsies can be done very quickly and give veterinarians and animal owners great information. For neonatal calves, necropsies can help guide changes in maternity areas, colostrum collection, handling and administration. In older calves, necropsies can be a great diagnostic tool in the face of a disease outbreak and help to guide vaccination and treatment protocol changes. Performing necropsies on calves can lead to increased calf consulting business for veterinarians. There are many different challenges when working with calves and necropsy can help to guide a veterinarian in making changes that will improve the health and welfare of calves on a dairy.

