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Disease causing more mare abortions

LOSSES AMOUNT TO \$3-4 MILLION

By Maryjean Wall
HERALD-LEADER RACING WRITER

A bacterial disease has caused abortions in upwards of 40 mares in Kentucky this year, resulting in an economic loss of \$3 million to \$4 million.

The University of Kentucky's Livestock Disease Diagnostic Center has confirmed that cases of equine leptospirosis are up from two cases last year.

Dr. Craig Carter, epidemiologist with the diagnostic center, said most of the 40 cases this year have resulted in foal loss by pregnant mares.

At least three of the foals diagnosed at the center were foals valued "in the million-dollar range," Carter said.

But he also said this disease does not resemble the Mare Reproductive Loss Syndrome that caused foal deaths and abortions by the thousands in 2001.

An estimate by University of Louisville economists placed a \$450 million economic impact on that syndrome.

In contrast to MRLS, which seemed to appear from out of nowhere and has not been seen since 2002, leptospirosis is embedded in the environment and appears every year, according to Carter, with "some years worse than others."

He said leptospirosis has been around "forever."

In contrast, MRLS "was unknown to science at that time and was a scary thing," Carter said. "It was associated with the caterpillar."

Scientists at the diagnostic center said they believe the jump in cases could be related to the increased rainfall experienced last year.

As a result of the increased number of cases seen this year, a working group has been put together to begin a comprehensive epidemiological study based in the Bluegrass, as well as a nationwide economic-impact study.

Equine leptospirosis is found worldwide and can affect many species including horses and people.

According to a press release from the diagnostic center, the source of the bacteria is the urine of wild animals, including mice, squirrels, foxes, skunks, opossums and deer.

Horses are infected when bacteria enter through the skin or mucous membranes of the eye or mouth by contact with blood, urine, or tissues from infected animals. The infection can also occur when horses eat hay or feed contaminated by infected urine.

Once infected, horses can experience fever, become listless or be reluctant to eat. Their

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