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RE: Managing Ringworm ahead of Show Season

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As we gear up for county fairs and the National Western Stock Show, it is time to finalize animal health checks and Certificates of Veterinary Inspection (health papers). A common hurdle that can quickly halt a show season is **ringworm**—a highly contagious fungal infection (*Trichophyton verrucosum*) that affects cattle, sheep, horses, goats, and small animals.

Because ringworm spreads rapidly and requires weeks to fully resolve, early detection and strict biosecurity are critical. **Please remember that animals with active lesions cannot be cleared for exhibition until they are fully healed.**

What to Look For (Symptoms & Seasonal Behavior)

- **Lesions:** Look for circular patches of hair loss, typically 1 to 10 cm in diameter.
- **Appearance:** The affected areas will develop heavy, gray-white crusts and underlying redness. If crusts are removed, the skin underneath will appear raw and hairless.
- **Location:** In younger calves, lesions frequently appear around the face, eyes, ears, and neck. In mature livestock, they can spread across the neck, trunk, and tailhead.
- **Seasonal Trends:** Ringworm is frequently severe in confined cattle during the winter months. Spontaneous recovery often occurs naturally in the spring and summer. Because of this, many treatments appear successful simply because spontaneous recovery begins shortly after treatment is started.
- **Note:** Unlike many skin conditions, ringworm lesions generally do not cause itching.

Transmission & Biosecurity

Ringworm spreads via direct animal-to-animal contact or through contaminated equipment. The fungal spores are incredibly resilient and can survive for long periods on surfaces.

- **Equipment:** Brushes, clippers, combs, halters, blankets, and grooming chutes should never be shared between animals without thorough disinfection.
- **Environmental Risk:** Barns, trailers, and pens can harbor spores.
- **Zoonotic Risk: Ringworm can easily transmit to humans.** Always wear gloves when handling suspected animals and wash your hands thoroughly. If you suspect you have contracted it, please consult a physician.

Prevention & Environmental Control

- **Disinfection:** Clean equipment and pens with a strong detergent, followed by a **1:3 dilution of bleach and water**. For leather tack and grooming tools, follow disinfection with proper oiling to prevent damage.
- **Environment:** Keep pens dry, reduce stocking density to limit physical contact, and maximize your animals' exposure to natural sunlight, which naturally inhibits fungal growth.

Treatment Protocol

Topical treatment—applying medication directly onto the lesion—is the standard procedure. However, medications cannot penetrate the heavy fungal crusts, so proper preparation is required.

1. **Crust Removal:** Before applying any medication, the crusts must be removed by scraping or brushing.
2. **Biosecurity Disposal: Collected crusts and debris must be burned** to avoid severely contaminating the premises and pens.
3. **Application Frequency:** Lesions should be treated topically at least twice, spaced three to five days apart.
4. **Approved Topical Options:**
 - 2% solution of iodine
 - Whitfield's ointment (the same ointment used to treat athlete's foot in humans)
 - Thiabendazole paste
 - Chlorhexidine
 - A 1:16 lime sulfur rinse
5. **Systemic / Oral Treatment:** Oral griseofulvin may be used for severe infections. However, due to the prolonged treatment timeline and high expense of the drug, this method is generally impractical for commercial herds and is typically reserved only for highly valuable seedstock or show animals.

Because the fungal clearing and hair regrowth process takes several weeks, **early intervention is key** to ensuring your livestock are ringworm-free and eligible for the show ring. Please reach out if you need to schedule a herd health check or require assistance with a suspected case.