Research Note

Salmonella Prevalence in Bovine Lymph Nodes Differs among Feedyards

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ABSTRACT

Lymphatic tissue, specifically lymph nodes, is commonly incorporated into ground beef products as a component of lean trimmings. Salmonella and other pathogenic bacteria have been identified in bovine lymph nodes, which may impact compliance with the Salmonella performance standards for ground beef established by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Although Salmonella prevalence has been examined among lymph nodes between animals, no data are currently available regarding feedyard origin of the cattle and Salmonella prevalence. Bovine lymph nodes (279 superficial cervical plus 28 iliofemoral = 307) were collected from beef carcasses at a commercial beef harvest and processing plant over a 3-month period and examined for the prevalence of Salmonella. Cattle processed were from seven feedyards (A through G). Salmonella prevalence was exceptionally low (0% of samples were positive) in cattle from feedyard A and high (88.2%) in cattle from feedyard B. Prevalence in the remaining feedyards ranged widely: 40.0% in feedyard C, 4.0% in feedyard D, 24.0% in feedyard E, 42.9% in feedyard F, and 40.0% in feedyard G. These data indicate the range of differences in Salmonella prevalence among feedyards. Such information may be useful for developing interventions to reduce or eliminate Salmonella from bovine lymph nodes, which would assist in the reduction of Salmonella in ground beef.

Lymph nodes are commonly found in lean trimmings destined for ground beef production. Lymphatic tissue, specifically lymph nodes, has been identified as a potential source of pathogenic bacteria (2). Most previous studies have been focused on Salmonella in mesenteric lymph nodes (4, 5). However, in some studies the prevalence of Salmonella (2) and other bacteria (3) has been analyzed in lymph nodes destined for use in ground product as a component of lean trimmings. Although contradicting bacterial prevalence data have been reported, research has been focused on prevalence among types of lymph nodes rather than on the origin or source of the cattle. In the most recent research (2), Salmonella prevalence in lymph nodes potentially destined for ground products was low.

The present study evolved from an effort to identify the possible cause of periodic increases in Salmonella prevalence in a commercial beef harvest and processing establishment. After multiple years of collecting data, including carcass mapping, environmental factors, weather patterns, and other processing data, the management of this establishment speculated that the feedyard source of cattle might be related to Salmonella prevalence. After monitoring Salmonella data over time and focusing on how these data related to cattle origin, the potential for variation in Salmonella presence among feedyards was suggested. With limited data available in this field of research, the present study was designed to determine whether Salmonella prevalence in bovine lymph nodes differed among cattle from different feedyards.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sample collection. Three hundred seven bovine lymph nodes were obtained from beef carcasses at a commercial beef harvest and processing establishment. Four collection trips were conducted over a 3-month period (July through September). Each collection trip was designed to obtain lymph nodes from preselected feedyards in the southern United States. The superficial cervical (n = 279) and iliofemoral (n = 28) lymph nodes were analyzed for this study. Superficial cervical lymph nodes were excised from unchilled carcasses that had been transferred from the harvest floor to the blast-chill cooler. Approximately one-half of the superficial cervical lymph nodes were excised from left sides and the other half were excised from right sides of the carcasses. Iliofemoral lymph nodes were collected from chilled carcasses during fabrication (approximately 24 to 48 h postmortem). Following excision, fat-encased lymph nodes were placed in labeled Whirl-pak bags (Nasco, Modesto, CA) and transported for processing to the Texas A&M University Food Microbiology Laboratory (College Station) in an insulated container with refrigerant packs. Upon arrival in the laboratory, lymph nodes were removed from the insulated container and stored under refrigeration (4°C) until processing.

Sample processing. All lymph nodes (n = 307) were aseptically trimmed free of fat and flame sterilized within 24 h of
Salmonella cells can be detected. Each minced lymph node was placed in a sterile stomacher bag with 225 ml of buffered peptone water (Difco, BD) and 1 ml of Salmonella phage technology (SPT) supplement containing brilliant green and novobiocin (bioMérieux). Samples were pumped for 1 min with a Stomacher 400 (Tekmar Company, Cincinnati, OH) and then incubated at 41.5°C for 22 to 26 h. A 0.5-ml aliquot of each enriched sample was introduced to a VIDAS SPT test strip containing predispensed reagents. Inoculated test strips were heated for 5 min at 100°C using a VIDAS Heat and Go unit and then allowed to cool for 10 min. Prepared test strips were then placed into a VIDAS automated immunoanalyzer for analysis within 48 min. Positive samples were those with a test value \( \geq 0.25 \). Presumptive Salmonella-positive cultures were confirmed by isolation on ChromID Salmonella (bioMérieux) after incubation for 24 h at 37°C. Light pink to mauve colonies were confirmed as Salmonella according to a USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service method (6) by streaking onto triple sugar iron agar and lysine iron agar (Difco, BD) slants. Tubes were incubated at 35°C for 24 h, and those isolates typical of Salmonella were further confirmed by a combination of biochemical and serological procedures. For serological confirmation, isolates were tested with polyvalent O antiserum reactive with serogroups A through I and Vi (Difco, BD). Those isolates that were positive for agglutination also were confirmed biochemically using commercially available API 20E (bioMérieux) kits following the manufacturer’s instructions. According to the VIDAS UP Salmonella (SPT) package insert, the relative detection level for the 50% detection limit is between 0.3 and 1.3 cells per 25 g and the sensitivity is 96.8%.

Lymph nodes analyzed at the USDA-ARS Center were prepared by adding 100 ml of tetrathionate broth (Difco, BD) to each filtered Whirl-pak bag and hand massaging the mixture for approximately 1 min. After incubation for 24 h at 37°C, 100 ml of the enriched culture was transferred to 5 ml of Rappaport-Vassiliadis broth (Difco, BD) and incubated an additional 24 h at 42°C. Ten microliters of this enriched culture was streaked onto brilliant green agar (Difco, BD) containing 25 µg/ml novobiocin and incubated for 24 h at 37°C. Suspect colonies were picked and transferred to triple sugar iron slants (Difco, BD), and presumptive-positive slants were further confirmed as Salmonella using slide agglutination with Salmonella antiserum (Difco, BD). The limit of detection was \( 10^2 \) CFU/g of tissue.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The first collection trip was organized to obtain a total of 57 bovine lymph nodes (29 superficial cervical and 28 iliofemoral) from cattle from four different feedyards. The intent was to collect and analyze 60 lymph nodes; however, three lymph nodes were compromised and excluded from analysis. More samples were collected from the primary feedyard of concern (feedyard F; 14 superficial cervical and 14 iliofemoral) than from the other three feedyards, which were chosen at random (feedyard A, 5 superficial cervical and 4 iliofemoral; feedyards B and G, 5 superficial cervical and 5 iliofemoral). After reviewing the results from the first collection, two interesting findings were noted. Of the four feedyards sampled, feedyard A provided no Salmonella-positive samples from both the superficial cervical and iliofemoral lymph nodes. In contrast, for feedyard B 100.0% of samples from superficial cervical lymph nodes and 80% of samples from iliofemoral lymph nodes were positive for Salmonella, for a cumulative 88.2% positive lymph nodes (Table 1). From the feedyard initially identified by the processing establishment as the primary source of concern (feedyard F), 42.9% of the samples were positive for Salmonella (Table 1), and no lymph nodes were collected from cattle from this feedyard on subsequent collection trips.

A second trip was made 50 days later to collect 25 superficial cervical lymph nodes from each of feedyards A and B and from two additional feedyards (C and D). Results from the second trip were again 0% Salmonella-positive samples for feedyard A and 100.0% Salmonella-positive samples for feedyard B; 40.0 and 8.0% of samples from cattle of feedyards C and D, respectively, were positive for Salmonella. These results corroborate those of the first collection trip, providing evidence that cattle from the two feedyards clearly differed with regard to Salmonella prevalence; however, the reason for these differences remains unknown.

A third trip was made 15 days after the second trip to determine whether the apparent difference in prevalence among yards remained. A total of 100 lymph nodes were collected from feedyards A, B, D, and an additional feedyard (E). No lymph nodes from feedyards A and D were positive for Salmonella, whereas 76.0 and 24.0% of lymph nodes from feedyards B and E, respectively, were positive for Salmonella. With the clear distinction between the same two feedyards being repeated, we began to inquire as to what contribution, if any, the country of origin of the cattle may make to these differences in Salmonella prevalence.

To address differences in prevalence due to country of origin, a fourth and final collection trip was made 4 days after the third trip, and 25 lymph nodes were collected from each of feedyards A and B. This collection focused on cattle solely of Mexican origin, whereas all other collections were made from cattle of U.S. origin. Similar results were found...
(0.0% positive samples from feedyard A; 88.0% positive samples from feedyard B), further indicating the potential influence of feedyard on Salmonella prevalence in lymph nodes.

Cumulative percentages of Salmonella-positive lymph nodes across collections and feedyards are shown in Table 1. The prevalence of Salmonella among feedyards was markedly different, especially between feedyards A and B. The present study provides the basis for additional research. Specific items for consideration may include cattle type and temperament, cattle stress levels and exposure, veterinary treatments administered, and preharvest interventions employed. Of greatest importance will be the investigation of practices and environmental factors that may be contributing to the complete absence of Salmonella in the lymph nodes of cattle from feedyard A versus continued presence of this pathogen in cattle from other feedyards.

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### REFERENCES


