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California Tuberculosis Update

A few months back we discussed the Tuberculosis situation in a California dairy herd and what that might mean to beef producers in the state. It is time for an update on this problem.

What has happened to the first infected dairy herd?

To begin with, all animals that came into the first herd and were sold from that herd were traced back and cattle in those "contact" herds have been tested for TB. More than 150,000 California cattle have been tested since May of 2002. One hundred dairy herds in the Tulare district have undergone whole herd tests. Secondly, the Tulare county dairy herd first found to be infected has been depopulated. All cattle in that herd have been slaughtered—cows, springers, yearlings, calves—all cattle. The total number of animals slaughtered from this herd was about 6,000 animals. The total number of California cattle slaughtered in 2002 because of the TB testing stands at nearly 8,000.

Have other herds been found to be infected?

Unfortunately, yes there have been two additional herds found with a single positive animal each. The first herd is a dairy herd with a single positive animal (so far) and this herd has been declared "infected" by the USDA. This herd is under quarantine and is undergoing regularly scheduled TB testing. This herd will most likely be depopulated and all cattle in the herd will be slaughtered. The second new herd with a positive animal is more complicated. This "herd" was a group of 33 cows assembled from various sources (dispersals, auction yards, etc) and taken to slaughter in Fresno. Nineteen of these cows were Holsteins, 10 were beef breeds, and 4 were not identified as to breed. One of these cows was found to be positive for TB. Trace back of these cattle is proceeding, but it will obviously take a long time. Because two herds were found to be infected within a 48-month period our state's TB status will change.

What will this change mean?

Since 1999 California has been classified as Tuberculosis Accredited Free. The last infected dairy (before 2002) was in 1985 and the last infected beef herd was in 1991. Since two herds (now three) were positive for TB within a 48-month period we will lose our Accredited Free status. The USDA has notified California officials that they will move to downgrade our TB status to Modified Accredited Advanced (MAA). This change will become effective when it is published in the Federal Register, probably by March of 2003.

What will the MAA status mean?

The change will have a major impact on our ability to ship cattle to other states. For example, all California breeding cattle will need official identification AND a negative TB test within 60 days of interstate movement. Alternatively, all breeding cattle

will have to originate from a TB accredited-free herd—this means official identification and mandatory annual TB testing of the herd. A third alternative would be that breeding cattle will move directly to slaughter. At the present time the USDA has approved a waiver on the identification and TB test requirements for feeder heifers and feeder steers moving interstate. Additionally, California is working with neighboring states to develop agreements to allow breeding cattle to move on pasture-to-pasture permits. This is particularly important as we moved over 100,000 cattle on interstate pasture-to-pasture permits last year. Sixty percent of these cattle originate in the Redding District, which is at very low risk of having TB infections. Our changing TB status and the reports of recent TB cases in other states (Texas, Michigan, North Dakota, and New Mexico) and the increase in TB cases of Mexican origin cattle indicate a need to re-evaluate policies to protect our cattle industry.

What is being done to solve this TB problem?

The USDA and CDFA have been working very hard to control and eliminate this disease. CCA has been a very important partner in this effort. The following is a partial list of general areas of activity that are being proposed or acted upon at this time.

1. TB test all dairy cattle in Tulare, Kings, and Fresno counties. This may take 1-2 years to complete; however, almost 20% of these dairies have already been tested one time.
2. Require a negative TB test on all breeding dairy cattle entering California.
3. Control and decrease the TB risk associated with cattle imported from Mexico.
4. TB test all breeding cattle >6 months of age within 60 days of leaving California. The USDA will require this TB test when we move to MAA status.
5. Develop pasture-to-pasture movement agreements with neighboring states.
6. Enhance education and training of veterinarians and cattle industry personnel to deal effectively with this re-emerging cattle health problem.

What is CCA doing on this issue?

The Cattle Health Committee devoted its 2002 Convention time to this problem and formed a TB working group that has been meeting with animal health officials and other industry groups to make sure regulatory changes minimize any negative impact to the industry and speed the process of regaining our Free status. At the local level, all cattlemen's association should be sure to send at least one representative to the CCA meetings and other pertinent meetings. This will keep the flow of vital information going in both directions. Working together we can solve this TB problem; alone we won't be very effective.

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