

June 2015
Volume 77 No. 3

TEXAS

VETERINARIAN

A PUBLICATION OF THE TEXAS VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION



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CAN YOU THROW ME A CURVEBALL?



By Dee Ellis, DVM, MPA,
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The best thing about being a veterinarian is that your job is never boring. No matter what kind of practice you are in, there is always a mystery to discover or ponder. That is no different in my line of veterinary work at the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC). The public thinks we are all Dr. Doolittle in some way. I have been in regulatory medicine for a long time now, and about the time I think I have it all figured out, I am thrown a curveball, sometimes many curveballs in one day. Thank goodness I have a great staff to help me and quick internet access! Here are a few real Texas issues that have come up recently where I had to regroup and ponder the answers to the solutions I was expected to provide:

- Glanders in a donkey?
- Melioidosis in a macaque?
- Vampire bat attacking cattle?
- Trichomoniasis in a bison?
- West Nile Virus in a bull?
- Anthelmintic use in Oryx?
- Q fever in a sheep?
- Equine babesia (piro) in nilgai?
- Bovine babesia (Texas Fever) in nilgai?
- Avian influenza in sand hill cranes?
- Compost a turkey?
- Tuberculosis (TB) in fallow deer?
- Swine Ebola disease response plans?
- Screwworm threat from Cuba?
- Potbellied pigs going to a state park for vacation?
- Drug withdrawal times in white tail deer?

And my favorite problem I was recently asked to solve;

- How to make a possum quit peeping at the caller every night through the living room window (from a lady in Corpus Christi)? By the way, closing the curtains was not an acceptable answer. I guess I swung and missed at that curveball.

Well, you get the point. TAHC is no longer

just your Dad's brucellosis agency, and veterinary medicine in general is of course much more complex as well. Nonetheless, I am proud to compete in the Veterinary Jeopardy quiz every day when I show up to work, and I am sure you are too.

Now I would like to continue with my topics from the last article and give you some more brief updates for ongoing TAHC program work. In the April issue, I provided updates on fever ticks, TB and Equine Infectious Anemia (EIA) programs. Here are updates on Equine Piroplasmiasis (piro), Vesicular Stomatitis and feral swine issues in Texas.

The countywide testing of all horses for piro is almost finished in Brooks County (Falfurrias). TAHC and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) staff have tested approximately 700 horses to date and have not found any infected animals. This is the third countywide test of all equine and the first negative county test completed.

Our goal is to identify a northern ring of negative counties around the previously identified piro pasture cases in Kleberg and Kennedy counties in South Texas and then start to work our way down toward Mexico. It is anticipated we will still need to test all of Cameron, Willacy and Hidalgo counties, as I am sure they have positive horses. We may need to test part of Nueces and Jim Wells counties to complete a negative buffer zone. We are testing down there because we are worried about pastures supporting infected tick populations rather than the needle-spread piro found in racing Quarter Horses. Once infected horses are removed from a pasture, the tick population will clear itself of babesia infection within a year. Our goal is to ensure that Texas is free of tick vector-spread piro in pasture settings.

Texas had the largest outbreak of Vesicular Stomatitis (VS) in cattle and horses in history last summer, as did Colorado. Six state veterinarians (including me) met earlier this year with USDA

officials to determine what lessons were learned from the outbreak and to try and harmonize entry requirements for next year, thus making it easier for equine owners and veterinarians to move horses interstate during an outbreak. The most important discussion centered on the validity of a 30-day health certificate during a disease outbreak with a short incubation period. The consensus was that susceptible species animals moving from affected states needed a shorter validity time for health certificates. The group decided that 14 days was a reasonable compromise to decrease the chance of infected animals moving while not overburdening producers.

If Texas finds more VS cases next summer, many states will require a 14-day expiration on certificates you are writing for horses and cattle leaving the state. Don't forget that TAHC also has rules proposed to shorten the expiration of a Texas equine certificate from 45 to 30 days to comply with USDA regulations. That rule will become effective in mid-July if passed.

Finally, TAHC commissioners are expected to pass a proposed rule in June allowing TAHC to consider facilities hosting feral swine "Hog Dog" contests as a type of terminal feral swine holding facility. This will give TAHC the ability to regulate the movement of feral swine involved in the contests to ensure they remain in terminal channels. As you may be aware, more and more dogs used for feral swine contests or hunting are coming down with Pseudorabies. The interest in feral swine is not going away as long as Texas has three million of them and folks like to hunt and play in the woods. TAHC regulates the movement of live feral swine to protect many species, not just swine. Live feral swine are only allowed to move to slaughter or to holding facilities that congregate them prior to sending them to slaughter. [TV](#)