



NEWS RELEASE

Texas Animal Health Commission

"Serving Texas Animal Agriculture Since 1893"

Dee Ellis, DVM, MPA • Executive Director

P.O. Box 12966 • Austin, Texas 78711 • (800) 550-8242 • www.tahc.texas.gov

For more information contact the Communications/PR Dept. at 1-512-719-0710 or at bonnie.ramirez@tahc.texas.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 6, 2014

TAHC Re-evaluating Current Prohibition of Dairy Cattle in Portions of El Paso and Hudspeth Counties

AUSTIN – The Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) will have field personnel working in portions of El Paso and Hudspeth counties in the coming months conducting a Bovine Tuberculosis (TB) risk assessment of livestock and wildlife. A law passed during the 83rd Texas Legislative Session authored by State Representatives Mary González and Poncho Nevárez and sponsored by State Senator José Rodríguez, directed the TAHC to conduct a study to determine the current risk level for Bovine TB in the area.

The ultimate goal of the study is for the TAHC to reconsider the current prohibition of dairy cattle in parts of El Paso and Hudspeth counties, in a report to be completed by September 1, 2014. The original prohibition on dairy cattle in the region was implemented by the TAHC in 2003 as a result of recurring and long term TB infection in local dairies, and the loss of Texas' TB Free designation by USDA. Approximately 12,000 head of cattle in 10 dairies were located in the El Paso milk shed prior to the prohibition.

Tuberculosis testing of susceptible livestock will be an essential part of the risk assessment process. Testing of all cattle in the existing high risk area, along with representative sampling of small ruminants (goats/sheep), swine, and selected wildlife is scheduled to begin February 3, 2014. Dairy cattle near the high risk area will be tested as well.

Two informational public meetings will be held by agency representatives prior to the beginning of the testing. Texas Animal Health Commission representatives will provide key information regarding the disease, testing, and the overall risk assessment process. El Paso and Hudspeth County livestock owners, veterinarians, and stakeholders are encouraged to attend the meetings. The first meeting will be held on Tuesday, January 21 at 5:30 pm in Hudspeth County at the Community Center/Building, 561 S. Knox, Fort Hancock, Texas. The second meeting will be held Wednesday, January 22 in El Paso County at 9 am at the Texas A&M AgriLife Research Center, 1380 A&M Circle, El Paso, Texas.

Bovine TB is a chronic, debilitating disease of cattle and other species caused by the bacterium *Mycobacterium bovis*. Symptoms can include progressive weight loss, chronic cough, and unexplained death losses. A variety of other animals such as bison, goats, deer, elk, swine, and cats are susceptible, while sheep and horses are rarely affected. Bovine TB can also affect humans that come in close contact with affected animals or consume unpasteurized milk products from affected dairy animals.

Tuberculosis (TB) has a long incubation period (months to years) and was once the most prevalent infectious disease of cattle and swine in the United States. Bovine TB caused more losses among U.S. farm animals in the early part of the 20th century than all other infectious diseases combined. Through a cooperative state-federal program, bovine tuberculosis has been nearly eradicated from livestock in the US. Texas has been declared free of TB, but constant vigilance is crucial to maintaining that TB-free status.

Like many other diseases, bovine TB transmission occurs more easily when animals are concentrated in close confinement. Infected animals normally spread the TB bacteria to their herd mates by expelling infected droplets from their lungs. Ingestion of the bacteria is also possible.

"The TAHC is diligently working with the Texas livestock industry to maintain Texas' TB free status," Dr. Andy Schwartz, Assistant Executive Director & State Epidemiologist, said. "The TAHC is asking for the support of livestock owners and veterinarians to make this risk assessment effort a success and help assure the health of the state's livestock population."

El Paso and Hudspeth County livestock owners and/or veterinary practitioners and others who have questions can call the El Paso TB Study team at 915-478-0815, or the TAHC Region 6 Office at 512-556-6277. For more information on Tuberculosis, visit http://www.tahc.state.tx.us/animal_health/cattle_tb/cattle_tb.html .

The Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) strives to keep Texas' livestock disease free, ultimately allowing for better marketability and commerce.

###

Existing Dairy Prohibition Area

