



Cattle Brucellosis

What is Brucellosis?

For nearly 50 years, Texas cattle producers have battled Brucellosis. The disease is also known as “Bangs”. The disease is caused by the *Brucella abortus* bacteria. Cattle Brucellosis is a zoonotic disease which can be spread from animals to humans. It caused significant human disease until the eradication program reduced the incidence of the disease in cattle, and sanitary practices and pasteurization procedures for milk were implemented to reduce transmission to humans. Human Brucellosis is still a major concern in many third world countries where unpasteurized milk or cheese is routinely consumed.

History of Brucellosis in Texas

On February 1, 2008: The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) officially declared Texas free of cattle Brucellosis. For the first time in recorded history, all 50 states were Brucellosis free.



Texas was the last state to achieve “free” status. It was a hard-won victory. In the early days of the program, Brucellosis infection often meant losing a herd with only a salvage value payment, or having the herd under quarantine and being unable to sell animals for long periods of time. Some producers’ herds became re-infected. As the program advanced, infected herds were purchased from owners and depopulated with government funding whenever possible to quickly wipe out infection

Moving Forward

We must continue to search for Brucellosis indefinitely to ensure that the disease is not re-introduced to Texas. Vigilant surveillance strategies must continue to quickly identify any remaining undetected infected herds.

Brucellosis Testing

In the summer of 2011, the TAHC suspended mandatory testing of adult cattle for change of ownership. Livestock market testing is now voluntary. The TAHC strongly encourages voluntary testing of breeding cattle to keep Texas Brucellosis free and provide extra assurance to the buyers that their cattle are disease free.



Slaughter surveillance is being reduced by USDA and cannot be counted on alone to ensure the disease is completely eradicated from cattle herds in Texas and other states.

Animals testing positive on the blood test will continue to be found through voluntary testing at markets, at slaughter in some selected plants at change of ownership when requested. Culturing of suspect cattle at the TAHC laboratory is essential to help determine the cause of the serological response. Testing the herd of origin may be necessary to determine whether or not additional evidence of infection exists.

Positive test results may be caused by the Strain-19 Brucellosis vaccine (no longer used) in very old cows, or by Swine Brucellosis which can also infect cattle. Positive test results may also be caused by the previously undisclosed field strain, *Brucella abortus*, which is still prevalent in portions of the Yellowstone Park states of Montana, Idaho and Wyoming.

Swine Brucellosis, a related disease carried by many feral (wild) swine, can be a diagnostic challenge. Blood tests alone cannot distinguish the type of Brucellosis. This disease has been detected in Texas cattle on many occasions.

Vaccination: Still a good Idea

The RB-51 vaccine, currently in use, provides protection against the cattle strain without causing a false-positive Brucellosis test result. It is recommended that only heifers, not bull calves, be vaccinated between the ages of four and 12 months old. Many western states still require heifers entering their state to be vaccinated. Calfhood vaccination may also provide added value to Texas heifers sold for feeding or breeding purposes because of their enhanced immunity, ability to comply with other state entry requirements and the vaccination tag also complies with pending USDA rules requiring permanent identification for interstate movement.

Call the State of Destination

States have the authority to require a Brucellosis test and proof of vaccination for female cattle before entering that state, even on cattle from a “free” state like Texas. Call the state veterinarian’s office in the state of destination to ensure that entry requirements may be met before shipping cattle. You may find the list of State Veterinarians at <http://www.usaha.org/Portals/6/StateAnimalHealthOfficials.pdf>, or by contacting the Texas Animal Health Commission at 1-800-550-8242.

Help Keep Texas Brucellosis Free

Continue management strategies to prevent the introduction or spread of Brucellosis.

- Test herd additions
- Vaccinate replacement heifers
- Control feral swine populations, especially in cattle feeding areas
- Report signs of disease (abortions, weak calves, low milk production) to the TAHC and/or your local veterinarian

Information provided by the
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