



Safeguarding Animal Health



TB Troubles

Minnesota beef producers must make modifications in effort to regain TB-free status.

by *Kindra Gordon*

Amidst historically high feed and fuel prices, Minnesota beef producers have been facing an additional new challenge. In April, the state's bovine tuberculosis (TB) status officially dropped from "Modified Accredited Advanced" to "Modified Accredited."

The downgrade came as the result of several deer and bovine cases that have been identified in northwestern Minnesota as being infected with the disease. Bovine TB is a contagious and infectious disease caused by *Mycobacterium bovis*. It affects cattle, bison, deer, elk and goats, and it can be fatal. Since the initial 2005 discovery of bovine TB in Minnesota, 11 infected beef cattle herds have been identified, all in the northwest Minnesota counties of Beltrami and Roseau.

As a result of Minnesota's reclassified TB status, federal testing is now required for all cattle (and bison) being shipped from Minnesota to other states. Individual states may also impose their own more stringent testing restrictions. (See "TB testing requirements.")

"This disease is an economic burden for

our beef producers, and we are committed to eradicating it as quickly as possible," Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA) Assistant Commissioner Joe Martin said in a statement. He is the state's bovine TB response coordinator. Martin points out that individual TB testing is a two-step process that must be conducted by a veterinarian and costs \$5-\$10 per animal in addition to the vet fee. An average of 200,000-250,000 cattle require testing to move out of Minnesota annually.

University of Minnesota Beef Center Extension educator Ryon Walker says it is hard to assess the economic impact to Minnesota's beef producers. He acknowledges it is taking a toll. In addition to testing fees, Walker reports that current market prices for Minnesota calves are less than calves from out of the state, with the biggest hit on those calves coming out of northwest Minnesota.

Additionally, Walker says that the trouble and pain TB is causing for the producers, their families and the morale of those producers is evident in the state.

Working to eradicate

In an effort to help restore Minnesota's beef economy, the Minnesota Board of Animal Health (BAH) is working diligently to establish a "split-state" status so that only a small portion of the state — in the northwest where the infected animals have been found — is required to conduct the federal testing. The proposed "split" region would affect about 300 cattle herds in portions of Roseau, Marshall, northern Beltrami and Lake of the Woods counties.

If split-state status is granted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the remainder of the state could return to TB-free status.

"Split-state status will allow us to concentrate our resources in northwestern Minnesota, where they are needed most," BAH Executive Director Bill Hartmann says. "At the same time, it will reduce the testing burden on producers in other parts of the state that have not seen bovine TB."

Likewise, it would help ease the burden on veterinarians. Minnesota presently has 450 veterinarians certified to test for TB, which MDA officials say is insufficient if the entire state is subject to the testing requirements.

To help work toward split-state status, which Minnesota officials hope is granted by this fall before the bulk of spring calf marketing begins, Governor Tim Pawlenty has signed legislation that provides the Minnesota BAH with expanded regulatory authority and funding to implement a TB eradication plan in the affected zone.

Walker explains that once implemented, the plan needs to demonstrate to USDA authorities that the state can successfully control the bovine TB spread. Included in the plan:

- ▶ BAH will increase livestock testing;
- ▶ tighten restrictions on animal movement;
- ▶ provide cost-share assistance for fencing in certain areas; and
- ▶ offer a "buy out" option to livestock owners in the disease management zone.

In addition, the legislation directs that a per-head assessment be collected on all cattle sales in the state between Jan. 1, 2009, and Dec. 31, 2009. The funds are to be collected by the MDA for the purpose of helping fund bovine TB control activities.

Because wildlife are often the culprit in spreading the disease, the legislation also requires the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to implement a wildlife feeding ban within the proposed TB split-status zone. Anyone violating the feeding restrictions can have their hunting

license revoked for two years following conviction.

MDA's Martin reports that there was strong support for the legislation from producers and industry groups such as the Minnesota State Cattlemen's Association.

Buyout option

With the new legislation, livestock producers in the split-state zone had new regulations to follow beginning June 15, 2008. Herds in the zone are now required to have an annual whole-herd TB test and maintain up-to-date contact information with the BAH. Animals leaving the farm must have individual animal identification (ID), an individual TB test 60 days prior to movement and a movement certificate.

Under the terms of the buyout program, eligible cattle owners in the disease management zone must have signed a contract with the BAH by July 15, 2008, and were to be paid \$500 per animal. In return, cattle must be moved out of the zone or be harvested by Jan. 31, 2009.

If cattle are moved out of the zone other than to harvest they must have BAH approval and will be subject to several regulatory requirements.

No livestock will be allowed in the zone unless authorized by the BAH.

Participating cattle owners will receive annual payments of \$75 per animal, beginning June 30, 2009, and each year until the state regains its TB-free status.

For cattle owners who do not participate in the buyout, BAH will conduct a risk assessment to determine whether the operation's feed and forage crops are properly protected, and whether deer or elk are interfacing with cattle. The BAH can require cattle owners to fence livestock, or feed or forage crops, and will provide cost-share assistance of 90% of the cost, up to \$75,000.

Biosecurity critical

As the Minnesota beef industry moves forward in dealing with TB, Ted Radintz with MDA emphasizes that on-farm biosecurity is critical. He notes that diseases are transmitted by a few common routes and can be managed.

Among the important biosecurity steps, Radintz lists:

- ▶ good sanitation;
- ▶ isolation and acclimation of new animals;
- ▶ disease testing and monitoring within the herd;
- ▶ vaccination;
- ▶ recordkeeping; and
- ▶ maintaining a closed herd if possible.

TB testing requirements

In states with downgraded tuberculosis (TB) status — including Minnesota and portions of Michigan and California — all producers must abide by the following federal interstate movement requirements:

Feeder cattle and bison must have an individual negative TB test within 60 days of shipment. Sexually intact animals can only move to an approved feedlot.

Breeding cattle or bison must have an individual negative TB test within 60 days of movement and a negative whole-herd TB test within 12 months of shipment.

Finished cattle or bison have no testing requirements if animals move directly to harvest at an approved facility (federal- or state-inspected plant).

Additionally, import states may impose their own restrictions and requirements on animals coming from TB-affected areas. North Dakota and Wisconsin are two states that have established their own guidelines. For producers in states affected by TB, the best rule is to contact a veterinarian before transporting livestock out of state.

Likewise, the University of Minnesota's Ryon Walker suggests producers shipping cattle contact the state veterinarian of the destination state to find out exactly which animals need testing and at what point before shipment cattle should be TB-tested.

"Keep in mind that marketing or movement of some classes of animals will require a whole-herd test," he concludes. "Testing that many animals will require more labor, more time and good planning."

There are no detectable symptoms of bovine TB. Cattle may be infected for months to years before showing any outward disease signs, such as weight loss or nasal discharge.

Radintz adds that individual animal ID is also important so the health status and location of animals can be tracked and traced back to the herd of origin if necessary.

To reduce the transmission of TB, Lori Weddle-Schott, an Extension educator with the University of Minnesota Beef Center, stresses that limiting contact of herds with wildlife and even neighboring livestock is important. Weddle-Schott says it is important for producers to keep deer and wildlife out of stored feedstuffs and winter-feeding areas, as deer have been associated with spreading of TB in northwestern Minnesota.

Funding for protective fencing is being made available through the new Minnesota eradication plan.

Lastly, Weddle-Schott stresses that improving overall herd health should also be a priority for producers. This should increase the herd's wildlife resistance should TB exposure occur.

As fall marketing of calves approaches, Walker says planning will be paramount.

"First, producers need to know how they are going to market their animals and where they will be marketed or sent to," he says. "Then they need to follow up with that destination (if located in another state) and find out what their requirements are for TB testing. Lastly, set up a time to get your calves/herd testing [done] in a timely manner. The earlier a producer follows these steps, the easier it is going to be."



Editor's Note: The Minnesota Department of Health emphasizes that there is a very low risk of humans contracting TB from pasteurized milk or meat products. The pasteurization process kills bacteria in milk, and TB bacteria is rarely

present in muscle cuts. Moreover, carcasses are federally inspected for lesions that may have been caused by a possible TB infection. Furthermore, cooking meat to 160° F also kills the bacteria.

For the latest on the Minnesota TB situation, call 1-877-MN TB FREE (668-2373) or visit www.mntbfree.com.