

**Cattle Health
Committee Report**

2007 Mid-Year Report

September 2007



Chair: Dr. Karen Jordan, Dairy Farmers of America
Vice Chair: Jon Johnson, Texas Farm Bureau

Fever tick outbreak in Texas

Texas has a permanent quarantine zone (QZ) on the Mexican Border from Del Rio, Texas to Brownsville, Texas. Cattle moving out of this zone must be checked for ticks (scratched) and dipped. The QZ measures from approximately 7 miles wide to a few hundred yards wide and follows the highways that run parallel to the border.

This year alone we have had two outbreaks outside the QZ. The first was in Zapata County south of Laredo which has been expanded to include the adjoining Starr County. There are at least 50 herds under temporary preventive quarantine.

The second outbreak includes portions of Maverick, Dimmit and Webb Counties, north of Laredo. The total area covers 622,000 acres with 50,000 acres currently under a temporary preventative quarantine with 17 herds infected with ticks. There are also 7 herds inside the QZ that are infected.

Sources of the ticks are from Whitetail Deer, Nalgi Antelope, elk from Mexico and stray cattle from Mexico and the QZ.

USDA Tick Force has responsibility for managing the QZ. The Texas Animal Health Commission supplies the dip (Co-Ral an acaricide). Their Tick Force budget is \$8million and is in the President's 2007-2008 budget. This agency has seen its budget reduced over the past several years to the point that there are not adequate personnel to manage the area. USDA is sending an Assessment Team into the area to determine the needs.

The current outbreak will need approximately \$3 million, 30 people and 2 years to clean up. The \$3 million will be used to hire additional personnel, trucks, spray rigs, acaricides, water tanks, portable dipping vats and refurbishing existing portable vats.

NIAA should support implementation of the Cattle Fever Tick Strategic Plan 2006-2011 and funding to eliminate fever ticks from the temporary QZ and pushing ticks back to the border.

Over the past several years, the US has seen a resurgent of TB in Dairy cattle, beef cattle and wildlife. The following states have had cases of TB: Texas, New Mexico, Michigan, Minnesota, Colorado, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, South Dakota, and California.

It is felt that there is an infected dairy herd somewhere west of the Mississippi that is shipping infected calves to calf ranches and exposing multitudes of other cattle. Whitetail deer are also exposing cattle in Michigan and Minnesota.

States are beginning to implement rules that will require all dairy cattle be identified so they can be traced back to the herd of origin in an attempt to protect their cattle herds.

USDA is supposed to have the Domestic and International TB Rules out by this fall.

NIAA should strongly urge USDA to use prevalence of the disease as a qualifier to downgrade a state's TB status rather than the current 2 infected herds rule.

Loss of rBST

Loss of the use of rBST (and concern that other new technologies may be lost). Across the nation dairy farmers have been forced by their cooperatives to do away with the use of rBST. The cooperatives are citing that the buyers have surveyed their consumers and that no consumer wants milk from cows treated with rBST. The fall out is that dairy farmers have lost the use of a tool that has been approved for use in dairy cattle for many years and is still a legal, acceptable product but the dairy farmer that uses this technology has been threatened that his cooperative will not market his milk if he continues to use rBST.

On September 13, 2007 in Denver, Colorado there was an organizational meeting for dairy producers and agribusiness interested in coming together to form a nation wide organization for dairy producers. The proposed vision statement is: **supporting dairy producers' choice of production practices to provide consumers with safe, wholesome and nutritious dairy products.** Proposed mission statements: **Advocate for producers' freedom to choose approved production technologies and practices. Safeguard the image of milk in the market place. Influence and educate media to more accurately reflect the truth.** The loss of the use of a new and approved technology has far reaching implications to all of agriculture. Other concerns for all of agriculture include the following: loss of GMO crops, loss of reproduction programs, loss of confinement housing just to name a few. Any of the aforementioned best management practices or tools could easily be used in marketing schemes by processors of agriculture products that are trying to find a niche market.

Animal welfare issues continue to come up. May 8, 2007 the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Livestock, Dairy and Poultry held a hearing to discuss animal welfare issues. Chairman Boswell said: "It is evident that livestock producers are vigorously addressing animal welfare issues." Committee member Robin Hayes said: " Today's hearing demonstrated that the animal agriculture industry is committed to ensuring the humane treatment of animals in its care. Farmers and ranchers, not activists, should be dictating animal husbandry practices. Passing legislation based solely on emotion goes against the Committee's responsibility to use science and best management practices that are designed to improve animal welfare practices."

Across the nation many states have been forced to take another look at the sale of raw milk. Consumer groups have pushed the raw milk issue and many states have had to hold hearings in order to discuss raw milk legislation. On the web is a site maintained by the Weston Price foundation that is a big proponent of the consumption of raw milk. This site lists each state and what that states current law concerning raw milk sales are. The site also makes suggestions on how to achieve raw milk sales within a state. We are seeing many newspaper articles on the great links and efforts that consumers go to purchase raw milk. Many articles speak of an underground network, a secret society almost, in order to procure their raw milk. The individuals wanting raw milk are going to great links to purchase raw milk. One article talked of a group of suburban people that put together a car pool in order for one person to travel long distances in order to procure the raw milk for their area for the week. What is the correct response? There are about half of the states that allow the sale of raw milk in some fashion. Many states allow the sale of raw milk to be used only as pet food, but with a wink and a nod, everyone knows it is being used for human consumption. The industry could debate the pros and cons of the consumption of raw milk all day, the consumer (a loud group of them) wants raw milk, the health officials see the sale of raw milk as a disaster waiting to happen, the dairy farmer sees raw milk sales as a profit maker (Oregon, pint of raw milk on the shelf at \$3.25). Should this become a product that across the nation actually has standards, inspections (rigorous) and warning labels or do we as a nation continue to push this black market product underground, with no inspection, and no warning labels?