APHIS Factsheet

Veterinary Services

March 2014

Questions and Answers: Preventing Bovine Tuberculosis

Biosecurity Measures

Q. What can I do to keep my herd free from bovine tuberculosis (TB)?

A. Following these best practices will help keep bovine TB out of your herd:

- Have your livestock tested for TB and, if possible, keep a closed herd and raise your own replacement stock.
- Buy your animals from an accredited TB-free herd, test the new animals prior to purchase, and finally, isolate them for 60 days and retest before commingling them with your herd.
- Restrict or eliminate all contact between your herd and other herds.
- Clean with a disinfectant any trailers or facilities that have housed newly purchased animals or animals that did not originate from your herd.
- Keep on-farm visitors away from your herd whenever possible. This includes milk haulers, feed delivery personnel, and anyone who may have contact with other herds.
- Make sure your fences are in good condition to separate your herd from wildlife. If the wildlife in your area is affected by TB, contact the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Wildlife Services office in your State for advice on reducing wildlife contact with your herd. You can reach Wildlife Services staff by calling 1-866-4USDA-WS (1-866-487-3297).

Q. How can I make sure that the animals I buy come from a TB-free herd?

A. Always ask for a copy of the accredited TB-free herd certificate when you are purchasing animals. All accredited TB-free herds have this certificate. The certificate signifies the herd has tested negative for TB at least twice and meets the standards for an accredited TB-free herd. Those standards are available on USDA's Web site at www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/animal_diseases/tuberculosis/downloads/tb-umr.pdf.

Q. How can I make sure that the animals I buy have not been exposed to a TB-infected herd?

A. The best way to make sure that purchased animals have not been exposed to TB is to buy animals from an accredited TB-free herd. Additionally, have animals tested prior to purchasing and moving them to your premises. Isolate the new animals for 60 days and have them retested before commingling them with your herd.

Q. Are new animals introduced to my herd a threat?

A. Commingling new animals with a herd can introduce diseases, especially if they are not properly screened for disease prior to introduction. Make sure that the new animals added to your herd are screened for TB.

Q. How do I protect calves from disease exposure?

A. Unweaned calves are the most susceptible to illness. Separating calves from older animals is an effective management practice that will reduce the risk of disease exposure. In addition, using pasteurized colostrum and pasteurized milk or milk replacer is critical in reducing infectious diseases—such as TB, Johne's disease, Salmonella, and *E. coli*—that can be spread through milk.

Q. If there is a TB outbreak in my area, are there any additional biosecurity measures, above and beyond best practices, that I should take to reduce the chance of my cattle getting the disease?

A. Practice good biosecurity at all times. Do not commingle new animals with your herd without first isolating them for 60 days and having them screened for diseases. Also, do not allow visitors to the livestock areas of your farm, except for veterinary or regulatory personnel who may have to test your herd for disease. Prevent commingling or fence-line contact with other susceptible animals (domestic and wild).

Q. What biosecurity measures can I take at sale barns, shows, and exhibitions to lower the risk of disease exposure?

A. After visiting a sale barn, show, or exhibition, do not wear the same clothes—including footwear—around your own herd until you have cleaned and disinfected them.

Thoroughly clean any vehicles, trailers, equipment, and other items that have been to the sale barn, show, or exhibition. Disease can be transported by manure stuck on wheels, tires, and fenders, among other things.

When bringing animals home from a sale barn, show, or exhibition, isolate them from the rest of your herd for 60 days and have them tested before allowing them to commingle with the rest of your herd.

Animal Identification and Traceability

Q. How does animal identification help if there is a bovine TB detection or outbreak in my State?
A. When dealing with bovine TB, knowing the origin and movement history of all your animals can help you see whether or not they may have been exposed to the disease. Animal identification and good records can help regulatory personnel more quickly trace your animals and determine if they could have been exposed to TB. Traceability is the key to protecting animal health and marketability.

Q. Are there regulations in the United States that support traceability?
A. In addition to bovine TB regulations that govern official identification and movement requirements, a regulation for improving the traceability of U.S. livestock moving interstate took effect on March 11, 2013. The regulation improves our ability to trace livestock and poultry when there is a disease event and focuses on those species, such as the cattle sector, where improved capabilities are most needed. As a result, accurate traceability information is more readily available, enabling USDA to shorten disease investigation timelines.

To view a copy of this regulation ("Traceability for Livestock Moving Interstate; Final Rule"), go to www.aphis.usda.gov/newsroom/2012/12/pdf/traceability_final_rule.pdf.

Q. What are the requirements for moving livestock interstate under the final rule mentioned above?
A. Unless otherwise exempt, livestock covered in the rule must be officially identified and accompanied by an interstate certificate of veterinary inspection (ICVI) or other movement document. For more specifics, see USDA's summary of the requirements (cattle section is on page 2) at www.aphis.usda.gov/traceability/downloads/ADT_summary_species.pdf.

Q. Why are cattle tested for TB getting tagged with a certain type of radio frequency identification (RFID) tag?
A. USDA uses official identification RFID tags for its program disease work whenever possible. This includes bovine TB eradication efforts. The tags allow for faster and easier testing of cattle.

During TB testing, each animal needs to be handled twice—once to inject and once to "read" the test. The use of RFID tags eliminates the need to manually record identification numbers and greatly speeds the process. By reducing the time each animal is restrained, the RFID tags help reduce stress and increase the quality of the data obtained.

Additionally, the tags serve as more than just an official identification number for interstate movement. When paired with other commercially available hardware and software, the tags can assist cattlemen with other herd needs, including: animal movement and health records, breed registries, performance recording, and marketing programs.

Q. If my cattle need to be tested for TB, will they have to be tagged? Does it have to be an RFID tag?
A. One of the requirements associated with an official tuberculin test is that the animal tested must be officially identified, with the identification recorded on all associated test charts. RFID tags are not required; however, some form of identification that qualifies as official identification is required. For more specifics on official identification options, see USDA's summary of the requirements (cattle section is on page 2) at www.aphis.usda.gov/traceability/downloads/ADT_summary_species.pdf.

Protecting the Food Supply

Q. Do slaughtered animals suspected of having TB enter the food chain?
A. No. Animals that are identified as being suspicious for TB do not enter the food chain. Rather, samples are collected from them, and those samples are sent to the National Veterinary Services Laboratories in Ames, IA, or to USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) laboratory in Athens, GA, for diagnostic tests.

Q. If a herd has TB-positive animals, can slaughtered animals from the herd enter the food chain if they test negative for the disease?
A. Animals from affected herds that test negative are inspected by FSIS personnel at slaughter. If an inspector finds any signs or symptoms of disease, the carcass is condemned and does not enter the food chain. If there are no signs or symptoms of disease, the carcass is allowed to enter the food chain.

Q. Can TB transmission occur through eating infected cattle?
A. TB infection of muscle, or meat, is rare. Threats to human health occur through drinking unpasteurized milk or close contact with TB-infected animals who are coughing, sneezing, or vocalizing. Please visit www.fsis.usda.gov for information on how to properly prepare meat products for safe consumption.

Q. What can I do to help protect my family from bovine TB exposure?

A. Below are a few steps you can take to help prevent TB exposure:

- Do not drink raw or unpasteurized milk.
- Do not drink from a cattle watering source.
- Limit your exposure to sick animals and time spent in enclosed areas with livestock.
- Wash your hands well after handling any livestock, especially if they are sick or acting unusual.

Q. If I am exposed to a TB-positive animal, will I get TB?

A. If you have been exposed to a known TB-positive animal, consult your personal physician or local community health department and follow their recommendations.

Learn More

For more information on bovine TB, please visit USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service Web site at www.aphis.usda.gov. Click on "Animal Health," then "Animal Disease Information," and then "Tuberculosis."