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BRUCELLOSIS ERADICATION PROGRAM

The national brucellosis eradication program has entered a new phase and you may soon be reading that this program has been given ***emergency status.*** This should not be a cause for alarm. On the contrary, beef producers should view this as a very positive move and we all hope that the eradication program progresses successfully to its conclusion-no remaining brucellosis in cattle in the U.S.

In 1957, when brucellosis eradication became the goal of the brucellosis program (not just control of brucellosis, but elimination of the disease) there were 124,000 cattle herds in the U. S. that were infected with the brucellosis organism, *Brucella abortus*. Today, there are only 21 herds with brucellosis. The USDA has designated December 31, 1998 as the date to reach this goal of eradication. This last phase of eradication involves finding and removing the last infected animal. This phase is expected to be both difficult and expensive. That is the reason the USDA has developed this emergency action plan. Beginning in August 1997, all activities involving brucellosis surveillance and management were given top priority. Some of the keys to eradication will be: (1) eliminating all known affected herds, thereby removing the risk of transmitting the disease to other herds, (2) increasing surveillance efforts to find that last infected animal, and (3) informing the cattle industry and veterinarians about the importance of this final push toward eradication.

Currently, California has no infected cattle herds. The last herd (a dairy herd) was released from quarantine during December 1996. However, USDA and CDFA (California Department of Food and Agriculture) surveillance remains very high. During the last 12 months all dairy herds in California were tested four times (via milk tank testing) and 162 dairy herds had suspicious test results. All of these herds were evaluated and 54 herds underwent complete testing (39,593 cattle)-all herds were found to be free of brucellosis and all the test reactor cattle were found to be due to Strain 19 vaccination. Also, about 700,000 California cattle were blood tested for brucellosis through surveillance programs at sales yards and on farms. This additional surveillance resulted in complete testing of 62 herds, all were found to be free of brucellosis and five of these herds contained reactor cattle due to Strain 19 vaccination. As you recall, one of the main disadvantages of Strain 19 vaccination is the occasional animal that "reacts" on the blood test. These "reactors" that are not infected with the agent that causes brucellosis are referred to as "false positives." That is, they are positive on the blood test, but negative for the *Brucella abortus* agent. There is a new cattle vaccine, referred to as RB-51, which is used to protect cattle from becoming infected with *Brucella abortus*. One of the distinct advantages of this RB-51 vaccine is the fact that vaccination does not result in "false positive" test results or "false positive reactors." This vaccine is now available for use in California by accredited veterinarians. For a more complete discussion of RB-51 refer to the September 1996 issue of the CCA magazine. Also, contact your veterinarian with specific questions regarding vaccination of your heifers. The RB-51 vaccine will be very helpful in eliminating the false positive test results that currently consume so much time and effort. Producers, in particular, will be happy not to gather cattle for blood tests due to false positive reactors from Strain 19 vaccination.

Brucellosis is a complicated disease and infections in heifers may cause delays in the final eradication efforts for the next two or more years. Therefore, it is important that producers and veterinarians continue to be aware of brucellosis and help identify potential problems so appropriate diagnostic tests can be done before large problems occur. California has applied to the USDA to be reclassified from a Class A State (no more than 0.25% of all herds infected) to Class Free Status (no infected herds under quarantine in the past 12 months). Reclassifying California's status to a Brucellosis Free State will remove certain restrictions on the interstate movement of cattle from California, including testing requirements. This will reduce some economic burdens on California cattle producers.

Another potential problem related to brucellosis eradication in the U. S. is the high rate of brucellosis in bison (buffalo) and elk in the Yellowstone Park area. This directly threatens beef cattle and other species in Idaho, Montana, and Wyoming. Because of the manner in which bison and elk are currently managed in Yellowstone Park, the possibility that brucellosis could escape into the domestic animals is a reality. The CCA and NCBA are both working with all agencies involved to keep a disaster such as this from occurring.

My hope is that by the start of the next century, brucellosis in the United States will be a disease of historical interest only. However, there is still much work to be done in this regard.

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