

# Producers, prepare for more TB testing

By JENNIFER VINCENT



MICHIGAN'S battle with bovine tuberculosis in both cattle and deer continues.

The Michigan departments of Agriculture and Natural Resources announced Jan. 24 that two TB-positive deer were harvested during deer season in Iosco County, one on the southern boundary

## Editor's Note

of the TB-infected zone and one just outside of the zone.

More disconcerting is a highly suspect TB-positive deer harvested in Shiawassee County, just south of Owosso. That's more than 100 miles south of the infected zone!

It's not the only TB-positive deer

found this year. There were more than 8,000 deer heads brought in by hunters and taken at check stations. The DNR will have a final count on positive deer sometime in March. But because these are out of the TB-infected zone, producers, get ready for more testing.

A 10-mile radius of each infected deer now becomes a potential high-risk area. It's not time to push the panic button just yet; high-risk areas have been designated before. These designations are

dropped after six months of disease surveillance testing if no bovine TB is found, according to Steven Halstead, MDA state veterinarian.

However, this creates a potentially scary scenario, and a lot more work and spending for the state, which has already vested about \$150 million into the effort.

### Testing to be scheduled

All beef and dairy farms in the areas of infected deer will need to have a whole-herd test. About 90 farms are around the infected deer found in Iosco County, and 100 farms are around the suspect deer in Shiawassee County. MDA says it will begin contacting producers as soon as possible to schedule the tests before animals go out on pasture.

John Tilden, who works with MDA's TB eradication program, says the department appreciates the farmers' patience in getting the testing done and being flexible with scheduling. Testing does not cost the producer, and if preferred, producers can choose their own veterinarian.

However, it does mean the inconvenience of catching cattle twice for the injection and then the reading. A letter from MDA will be coming out soon to those that are impacted with instructions on how to proceed.

While the Shiawassee County deer that had lesions is yet to be confirmed TB-positive, MDA wants to schedule tests anyway and then cancel if the results are negative.

### Origins of deer

It will be interesting to know the true origin of the deer. The DNR, in working with Michigan State University, is able to determine a deer's origin to a particular county. Did it wander out of the infected zone?

Highly unlikely, according to Steve Schmitt, DNR wildlife veterinarian. Using tracking devices in the TB area, more than 50% of deer never moved more than five miles, and most of the rest traveled under 10 miles, with the farthest being 25 miles.

So what happens if we find cattle herds testing positive for TB in Shiawassee County?

They will have to be depopulated, but it doesn't necessarily compromise the Modified Advanced Accredited status of Lower Michigan outside of the infected zone. It would take more than three infected herds to trigger that outcome.

Deer have tested TB-positive outside of the infected zone before, in Mecosta and Osceola counties. But, no cattle herds tested positive. Let's hope that's the case again.

### Tough job ahead

Either way, as Jim Byrum, chairman of Michigan's Ag Commission says, the problem is not going to just go away without a whole lot of work and sacrifice.

There are some tough decisions ahead. The state needs to focus hard on TB eradication and take the bold steps, including seriously reducing the size of the deer herd in the infected area, to get there.



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