

More TB-positive herds alter program

By JENNIFER VINCENT

TWO additional tuberculosis-positive herds in the 11-county Modified Accredited Zone in northeast Lower Michigan have pushed Michigan over a threshold for allowing the “test and remove” process for TB-quarantined herds.

From this point forward, all positively identified TB-positive herds must be depopulated. Owners will continue to be indemnified for animals taken

Key Points

- Two additional dairy herds test positive for tuberculosis.
- Michigan Department of Agriculture revokes “test and remove” option.
- MDA says chance for improved TB-status requires depopulation for positive herds.

under quarantine, and according to Kevin Kirk, farms are generally able to re-enter production as soon as the herds are disinfected and inspected.

Kirk is special assistant to the state veterinarian at the Michigan Department of Agriculture.

The new cases, at this point, do not affect the Modified Accredited Status of the quarantined area or the Modified Accredited Advanced Status for the rest of Lower Michigan. Mitch Irwin, director of MDA, and members of his staff are continuing discussions with USDA.

A setback

A new bovine tuberculosis case hadn't

reared its ugly head in Michigan for 15 months. And, MDA officials were able to persuade USDA to treat the Upper Peninsula, which has no reported infections, differently with a TB-free status. All good news for Michigan's livestock industry, which has been impacted by slaughter problems, indemnification costs, test requirements, trade barriers, and animal-movement and identification procedures.

However, late last year, the state on the road to TB-free status encountered a pothole. Two additional herds tested positive for the virus, believed to be transferred from deer to cows through the environment and feed.

Michigan has been dealing with this disease since it was first found in 1997.

The TB-positive findings put the Michigan Commission of Agriculture in a tough spot. “One of the hardest things the department staff has to do is go to a farm and tell them they are TB-positive,” says Doug Darling, commission chairman. “It's going to be even more heartbreaking now that [it] means depopulation. That means telling some producers that a lifetime of genetics are gone.

“This is a very emotional decision, but it's the right thing to do for the entire industry in Michigan,” he adds.

No longer on the table for consideration, the test-and-remove program allowed herd managers to conduct periodic whole-herd tests and cull suspect animals. This was especially beneficial for dairies, as it continued cash flow and protected genetics.

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