

# Texas Dairy Matters

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## **Take Steps to Protect Your Herd against TB**

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In January the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) confirmed bovine tuberculosis (TB) in two Texas Panhandle dairies. Bovine TB is a bacterial disease caused by *Mycobacterium bovis*. Not only is it contagious, but it becomes a chronic infection. Although the bacterium infects the lungs, it may spread to other organs as well.

Early in the disease, symptoms may not be visible, but as the disease progresses animals become thin, lethargic, and weak. Some will have a low grade fever and may develop pneumonia with a cough. Enlarged lymph nodes are frequently seen at slaughter. Although bovine TB primarily infects cattle, it may also infect elk, deer, bison, goats, pigs, cats and even humans.

Pasteurizing milk will inactivate *M. bovis*; thus the pasteurized milk from dairy cows is safe to drink. Meat from infected animals is not allowed to enter the food chain.

### **So how can you protect your herd?**

Considering how herds have been infected during the last 10 years, there are three areas to address to prevent the introduction of the disease into your herd and its spread.

First, restrict contact between your herd and potentially infected herds. Some key areas to consider are:

- Keep a closed herd if possible.
- Raise your own heifers.
- Buy only animals that are from an accredited TB herd or that have been tested prior to purchase.
- Avoid common fence lines with adjoining livestock. It is particularly important to not share facilities with cattle of unknown origin, particularly cattle of Mexican origin, as they have been the source of several recent outbreaks. These Mexican

origin animals can legally be placed in feedlots or on “approved” pasture without testing as they are destined for slaughter. Roping steers have a testing procedure when they enter the country and subsequently, but should be avoided as well.

Second, if you feed whole or waste milk to your calves, pasteurize it. This will prevent the spread of TB throughout your replacements if an adult cow is infected. For calf ranches that pick up calves and waste milk from several farms, this is particularly critical.

Finally, control the human element. Consider adding TB testing as part of your new employee screening program. Many dairy owners have implemented drug screening programs for new hires as well as for all employees. Adding TB testing would be one more way to protect your herd and other employees. Of course, check with your attorney to set up a legal process to do any screening. In addition, keep on-farm visitors away from your herd, particularly if they have contact with other cattle either in the U.S. or in other countries.

Minimizing or eliminating contact with outside animals, including wildlife; pasteurizing milk for calves; and developing a TB testing program for employees are three ways to protect your herd. Take action today by reviewing your current procedures and adding biosecurity steps to reduce the introduction of not only TB, but other diseases.

<http://texasdairymatters.org>

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