

UNITED STATES ANIMAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION - 2004

RESOLUTION NUMBER: 37 **APPROVED**

SOURCE: COMMITTEE ON PARASITIC DISEASES

SUBJECT MATTER: TROPICAL BONT TICK ERADICATION PROGRAMS IN THE
CARIBBEAN

DATES: OCTOBER 27, 2004

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The Tropical Bont Tick (TBT), *Amblyomma variegatum*, and the associated disease heartwater were first introduced into the Caribbean region in 1828 when infested cattle were imported from Senegal into Guadeloupe. The tick remained confined to only a few Caribbean islands until the mid-1970s when it began to rapidly spread to other islands in the Caribbean, reaching Puerto Rico to the north and St. Vincent to the south. This rapid spread appears to have been coincident with the expansion of the range of cattle egrets in the Caribbean.

In affected countries, TBT and its associated diseases heartwater and dermatophilosis limit the potential for increased livestock production. In TBT-infested countries, control activities continue to be a drain on limited financial and human resources. Furthermore, there is a high risk of introduction of TBT and its associated diseases into the Americas and subsequent spread in the region due to the presence of wildlife and domestic animal hosts for the tick and its associated diseases, and native tick species capable of serving as vectors for heartwater. Spread of TBT and its associated diseases in the southern United States, Mexico, Central America, the Greater Antilles, and South America could result in \$655 thousand to \$3 billion potential annual losses.

Animal industry groups, state animal health officials, and federal officials have been concerned about the spread of TBT and its associated diseases to the United States since the mid-1980s. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Veterinary Services (VS) and International Services (IS) have actively supported our involvement in a program to eradicate TBT from the Caribbean since the mid-1990s. USDA, APHIS support has been by means of financial contributions and technical assistance to a multi-national program known as the Caribbean *Amblyomma* Program (CAP) since 1994. Under the auspices of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), CAP operates in nine English or Dutch-speaking islands in the Lesser Antilles.

The CAP also liaises with complimentary programs in the French West Indies administered by the Government of France, as well as a USDA, APHIS, VS program on St. Croix, US Virgin Islands, where TBT was discovered in the year 2000. Over the past decade, CAP has developed a proven methodology to eradicate TBT from the Caribbean. As a result, by February 2003, six of the nine CAP islands had achieved the status of "Provisional Freedom from TBT;" however, two of these have experienced significant re-infestations of TBT in the past year. Additional funds are urgently needed to not only address the presence of TBT on Antigua and St. Croix, but also to continue TBT eradication and surveillance throughout the CAP islands until the entire Caribbean region is declared TBT free.

RESOLUTION:

The United States Animal Health Association (USAHA) requests continued and increased funding from United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), International Services (IS) for the Caribbean *Amblyomma* Program (CAP), administered under the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), as well as funding for the USDA, APHIS, Veterinary Services (VS) program on St. Croix, to eradicate the Tropical Bont Tick (TBT) and its associated diseases of heartwater and dermatophilosis. USAHA also requests USDA, APHIS, IS and VS, by means of their membership in the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), to encourage their French counterparts to place greater emphasis on eradication of TBT from the French West Indies. We further request this funding be sought and allocated as soon as possible to mitigate the risk of spread of TBT to Puerto Rico and the United States mainland and to continue on-going surveillance efforts in the region against TBT until the Caribbean as a whole is free from TBT and its associated diseases.

RESPONSE:

The Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Veterinary Services, agrees with USAHA's Committee on Parasitic Diseases. International Services and Veterinary Services have developed a 5-year strategic plan that addresses long-term and short-term approaches to securing funding for this program. The strategic plan also lays out actionable items to continue to work with the French to support the French eradication efforts against the tropical bont tick. VS is actively engaged in an eradication program on St. Croix in cooperation with the Department of Agriculture of the U.S. Virgin Islands and is actively supporting involvement by the USDA, Agriculture Research Service to transfer new tick control technology to APHIS. This new technology will reduce eradication costs and improve APHIS' methodology for eradicating invasive pests, such as the tropical bont tick.