
RESOLUTION NUMBER: 20 APPROVED

SOURCE: COMMITTEE ON CATTLE AND BISON

SUBJECT MATTER: Tuberculosis Testing for Importation of Rodeo Cattle from Mexico

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Southern Border Ports, over 10,000 head of Mexican rodeo cattle were imported into the United States (US) in 2020. Although 86% of Mexico is classified as "eradication zones," there are no bovine tuberculosis (TB) "free zones" classified in Mexico. Based on testing requirements established in 2011-12, a veterinarian must complete a single caudal fold tuberculin (CFT) test for steers and spayed heifers. Mexican dealers take ownership of these animals, "M" brand them and sell them to US stock contractors. These cattle are then used for rodeo circuits that traverse many states.

Mexican rodeo cattle present a higher risk of TB exposure relative to Mexican feeder cattle, given they are longer lived, frequently move interstate, and may change ownership multiple times. State animal health officials familiar with this industry sector are aware that many of the animals retired from the rodeo circuit make their way onto private ranches for use as roping steers. Many end up in feedlots prior to slaughter, but many may also become untraceable due to rodeo sport industry practices.

Routine TB surveillance in the US is built on harvest surveillance at USDA inspected slaughter facilities. According to USDA, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), between 2001 and 2021, 75% of tuberculosis cases have been in Mexican origin fed cattle. USDA-APHIS has no current data for rodeo cattle at slaughter, but the industry can speculate based on fed cattle slaughter surveillance that some TB infected rodeo cattle may not be detected prior to import into the US and is especially concerning considering the sensitivity shortfalls of a single CFT test (85%).

The risk of domestic beef and dairy cattle being exposed to Mexican event cattle with TB has significant consequences, considering that US cattle infected with TB may not be detected for ten or more years (United States Animal Health Association (USAHA) 2021). This delay occurs because routine TB slaughter surveillance has limited detection

capabilities. The estimated sensitivity of slaughter surveillance for beef herds in the US ranges from 3-7%, and the probability of detecting an affected beef herd within five years ranges from 15-35%, depending on herd size (USDA-APHIS Veterinary Services, Center for Epidemiology and Animal Health 2009). Mexican origin cattle are listed as one of the three most likely sources of TB introduction in the US (USAHA 2021). Although bovine tuberculosis detections in US cattle have stabilized to about 10-15 cases per year, many of those cases are traced to Mexican origin animals; at least half in 2021 alone (USAHA). Inconsistencies persist between individual states' TB testing import requirements for Mexican roping/rodeo type steers. Some states require no additional testing, while others require one or even two CFT tests to be completed on US soil. As of 2021, Canada requires CFT testing paired with interferon gamma release assay (IGRA) tests within 72 hours of import for US rodeo cattle of the breed Corriente, Brahman Texas Longhorns, and American Bucking Bulls regardless of end-use to better screen for TB prior to entry. When the CFT test is paired with the IGRA, the sensitivity improves from 85% to 99% (USAHA 2021). The two tests used in parallel improves test sensitivity and increases the chance of detection of infected cattle that may be missed by a singular, subjective CFT test.

Despite tremendous efforts to eradicate *Mycobacterium bovis* in the US cattle population for over a century, novel strains of tuberculosis continue to emerge in western states in both beef and dairy herds with inconclusive epidemiological investigations. Combining established testing protocols presents an opportunity to increase screening sensitivity and safeguard the US cattle herd.

RESOLUTION:

The United States Animal Health Association urges the United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Veterinary Services to require caudal fold tuberculin tests paired with interferon gamma release assays prior to import for Mexican origin Corriente and rodeo type cattle, intended for exhibition, recreational or rodeo use while excluding from this requirement cattle for feeder or stocker use.

INTERIM RESPONSE:

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), Veterinary Services (VS) recognizes the concerns of the United States Animal Health Association (USAHA) and appreciates the opportunity to respond. The import requirements for tuberculosis (TB) testing of Mexican-origin cattle depend on the TB status of the region of origin and whether the animals are sexually intact. Current import testing protocols and testing methodologies are aligned with our domestic TB surveillance program. While rodeo cattle comprise a small percentage of the total number of Mexican-origin cattle imported each year, APHIS recognizes the perceived increased TB risk that these animals pose based on their longevity and tendency to travel and move interstate. APHIS will review potential avenues for further mitigating TB disease risk in these imported rodeo animals and assess the potential for additional disease testing.