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Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC)

Texas Animal Health Commission Announces Details of New Cattle Traceability Rule

AUSTIN - A requirement for adult cattle in Texas to have an approved form of permanent identification in place at change of ownership will go into effect January 1, 2013 according to the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC). The Commission amended its rules in June of this year to enhance the effective traceability of beef cattle movements in Texas, which is the cornerstone of disease control activities. Implementation of the changes was delayed by the Commission to ensure cattle producers understand the requirements and can prepare for the changes.

The amended rule permanently cancels the brucellosis test requirement for adult cattle at change of ownership, which was unofficially suspended in the summer of 2011. Although testing of adult cattle is no longer required with the rule change, all sexually intact cattle, parturient or post parturient, or 18 months of age and older changing ownership must still be officially identified with Commission approved permanent identification. This change primarily affects beef cattle, as dairy cattle in Texas have had an even more stringent identification requirement in place since 2008.

Before August of 2011, official identification devices such as eartags were applied automatically at the time a brucellosis test was performed. The inadvertent loss of the identification devices applied to cattle when brucellosis testing stopped has threatened TAHC's ability to effectively trace cattle as part of any ongoing disease investigation.

The TAHC routinely performs cattle health investigations where the identification and location of exposed/infected animals is critical to success. For example, 30 Brucellosis reactors, over 300 Bovine Trichomoniasis affected bulls and 22 bovine tuberculosis cases have been investigated by the TAHC to date in 2012. The new traceability rule will help preserve the TAHC's ability to identify and trace animal movements quickly and effectively, no matter which disease is involved.

A complete list of acceptable identification devices/methods may be found at www.tahc.state.tx.us, but the most commonly used devices include USDA metal tags, brucellosis calfhood vaccination tags, US origin 840 series Radio Frequency Identification tags (RFID), and breed registration tattoos or firebrands. Producers are encouraged to contact their veterinarian or TAHC to determine which method of tagging will be best for their operation.

Free USDA metal tags, and a limited number of free applicator pliers (dependent on available funding) will be provided by the TAHC to producers wishing to use them. The tags and/or pliers may be obtained by contacting local TAHC field staff and USDA APHIS Veterinary Services representatives. The TAHC is developing tag distribution partnerships with interested veterinary practitioners and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension offices. Partner contact information will be published as it becomes available. Producers may locate the closest tag distributor online at www.tahc.state.tx.us.

Frequently asked questions

Q: What age/class of beef cattle must have acceptable permanent identification?

A: Sexually intact adult beef cattle 18 months and up, and Mexican origin event cattle. Nursing calves, steers, spayed heifers, bulls and heifers under 18 months are exempt (unless heifer has calved).

Q: Where can I find the complete listing of all Commission approved permanent identification devices?

A: Producers may access the complete list at www.tahc.state.tx.us or by contacting any TAHC office or personnel.

Q: Do I have to use the free eartags offered, or can I use other acceptable methods of identification?

A: No, the free metal tags are not required to be used, but they are one low cost option.

Q: Will ear tag pliers be provided at no cost or will I have to purchase them?

A: A limited supply of eartag pliers is available at no cost. Because of the limited supply, producers are also encouraged to consider purchasing tagging pliers from any Ag supply outlets.

Q: Is this rule a federal rule?

A: No, this is a Texas rule, but it will put the beef industry in compliance with the anticipated USDA Animal Disease Traceability rule for interstate movement expected to be released later this year.

Q: When does this Texas rule go into effect?

A: To ensure that the cattle industry has ample time to understand the changes and prepare, implementation of this rule will not take effect until January 1, 2013.

Q: If my animal already has a silver test tag or orange vaccination tag in its ear, will it need to have a new tag applied if sold at a livestock market?

A: No. Animals presented with approved official Id's at a market will not have to be retagged.

Q: Can I move my cattle directly to slaughter from my farm or ranch without an ID?

A: Yes, ranchers can move an animal directly to slaughter from their premise without an ID. Breeding cattle otherwise changing ownership by private treaty (country sales) must have acceptable identification.

Q: What happens if my cattle are too weak to be safely tagged at market?

A: The TAHC has proposed an amendment allowing the waiver of the rule by a TAHC inspector in consultation with market ownership or management for weak cattle presented at a sale.

Q: Do I need to keep records when I sell my animal(s)?

A: Record keeping is not required when animals are sold, but is strongly encouraged.

Q: Who is responsible for maintaining the information related to eartag distribution?

A: All official identification numbers assigned will be maintained in a TAHC-managed database. The TAHC will not track individual change of ownership transactions.

For additional ear tag information, including the nearest distributor of free USDA tags, contact the TAHC Traceability Team at 1-800-550-8242 ext. 733, or visit www.tahc.state.tx.us .

Founded in 1893, the Texas Animal Health Commission works to protect the health of all Texas livestock, including: cattle, swine, poultry, sheep, goats, equine animals, and exotic livestock.