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December 4, 2009

Docket No. APHIS--2009-0073
Regulatory Analysis and Development
PPD, APHIS, Station 3A-03.8
4700 River Road, Unit 118
Riverdale, MD 20737-1238

Re: Comments on **Docket No. APHIS-2009-0073**

To Whom It May Concern:

The United States Cattlemen's Association (USCA) is pleased to submit the following comments to APHIS' Veterinary Services (VS) proposed action plan for managing bovine tuberculosis. USCA recognizes the importance of eradicating bovine TB in the U.S. cattle, domestic bison, and captive cervid herds as well as wildlife. We also concur that it is time to re-evaluate the decades old program. We would like to comment on the five areas in the proposed plan.

1. Mitigate Disease Introduction

- a. We agree that there needs to be additional requirements prior to foreign cattle entry into the U.S. We also see the validity of requiring certain classes of imported cattle to be sent to quarantined or terminal feedlots where those animals are only destined for slaughter and have no exposure to domestic cattle not destined for slaughter.
- b. Effort must be continued to detect and then reduce the prevalence of TB in wildlife.

2. Enhance Surveillance - The continued use of slaughter surveillance is critical to the success of the program. We also can see value in herd surveillance in areas with documented cases of TB, but believe unwarranted "movement testing" could hamper the producers' ability to operate. This is an issue that should be worked out with the State Veterinarians.

3. Manage TB-affected Animals and Herds - We agree with the proposed modifications for conducting epidemiological investigations and assessing individual herd risk. Also, we agree it is increasingly difficult to justify depopulating whole herds. We propose that multiple test-and-removal protocols be included in the options available. However, we believe VS should be responsible for indemnity funding and not "include cost sharing with the industry or state or developing an industry-funded 'insurance' program." In cases where indemnities are paid we do not think that these payments should be reduced per individual animal. While we realize there are instances where trace back to herds-of-origin has been difficult, we believe VS should build on its existing systems and not "depend on full implementation of an animal ID system." VS acknowledges that most of the cattle detected at slaughter with TB were

imported from Mexico. All imported cattle from Mexico and Canada should be permanently identified with import markings and easily traceable to the country of origin.

4. Modernize the Regulatory Framework - We agree that VS should “place greater emphasis on disease prevention.” Moving away from “inflexible design standards” should help by being able to adapt to changes more rapidly. We want to stress the importance of including the opportunity for public comment even if there is the move to a “notice-based” system to inform the public of certain changes.
5. Transition to a Zoning Approach - We agree that “reclassifying the status of an entire State when a disease is present only in a small geographic area may not be necessary to contain the disease and can be costly for the industry.” We recommend that the zoning approach would not be appropriate for a rapidly moving disease, such as foot and mouth disease (FMD), and would not support moving to a zoning based approach. We feel it is important that the state veterinarian be included in the following ways:
 - A. Serve as the lead consultant when identifying the area within each state encompassed by the proposed zone
 - B. Conduct a risk assessment
 - C. Define both the testing requirements and the movement restrictions.

We feel VS should continue certifying and publishing the TB status of individual states while recognizing infected zones and movement restrictions for animals within and around those zones.

Also, in the implementation of the proposed plan, there is reference to the responsibilities of producers and the industry. The point “Developing industry and producer-driven components of the TB program and generating the funds necessary to support these activities” would add another financial burden on this industry.

Animal ID and traceback is addressed in the proposed plan by stating, “rapid and effective response to TB occurrences will depend on full implementation of an animal ID system”. USCA feels there are higher priorities to the successful eradication of TB in this country rather than a full implementation of an animal ID system. These priorities include:

- A. A more accurate and user-friendly test to diagnose TB needs to be developed.
- B. More stringent import standards and test all cattle from countries infected with TB. APHIS officials need to do a better job of keeping up with high risk cattle imported into this country and make sure they are handled in compliance with their import restrictions.
- C. There needs to be a greater emphasis placed on controlling TB in wildlife and limiting TB exposure to the U.S. cattle herd.

USCA appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Veterinary Services (VS) proposed action plan for managing bovine tuberculosis and look forward to finally eradicating the disease from U.S. cattle, domestic bison, captive cervid herds, and wildlife.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jon Wooster", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jon Wooster, President