

MDA Offers New Tool in Battle Against Bovine TB



The Michigan Department of Agriculture continues to implement new strategies in the battle to eliminate Bovine Tuberculosis from the Michigan cattle herd. After 11 years of testing and management programs, we still see cases of Bovine TB emerging in northeast Michigan.

This spring the Department submitted a new memorandum of understanding (MOU) to the United States Department of Agriculture which employs a new tool in the equation: wildlife risk mitigation plans. These new plans, as part of the Wildlife Risk * A * Syst, attempt to identify possible areas of cross contamination from wildlife to cattle. It has been thoroughly documented that the reservoir of this disease rests with the wildlife and that cattle contract the disease when they co-mingle or share feed or water sources with the infected wildlife.

“Wildlife risk mitigation is prevention,” says Rick Smith, with the Michigan Department of Agriculture. “We want to prevent deer from accessing key parts of the farm.”

While the use of wildlife risk mitigation plans is voluntary, the department is hoping to offer some

incentives including reduction in the number of times a herd is tested, if a farm has completed the program.

“The wildlife risk mitigation plan is patterned after the Michigan Agricultural Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP) and like the MAEAP program we hope to offer certification to producers who complete the program,” Smith says. “We believe that certification of this program will effect marketing ability for some producers outside of Northeast Michigan.”

“We need something besides testing to increase consumer confidence,” he adds. “Completion of the risk mitigation program tells

your customers you have reduced the chance of introduction of the disease from the wildlife.”

Implementing the Program on the Farm

The wildlife risk mitigation program was introduced to producers in northeast Michigan through a series of MSU Extension meetings this past March. Following the educational meetings producers signed up to have individual on-farm evaluations conducted. David Minier, a MDA field veterinarian, is one of the veterinarians that have been assigned to complete the evaluations and certify farms in the area.



MDA Veterinarian David Minier, left, discusses the overall management of the farm with owner Carl Reimann before the walk-through evaluation.

Four MMPA field staff members have been trained in conducting on-farm wildlife risk mitigation evaluations. The trained member representatives will be available to walk members through the evaluation tool to pinpoint any necessary changes and to begin the process.

“We will be on the ground looking for interface between white tail deer and cattle,” Minier says. “We will be looking for places like feed storage, pasture land and water sources. Our goal is to reduce the interface without bankrupting the business.”

Taking into consideration the individual management styles of cattle operations is key for Minier in finding ways to implement the program. “We are trying to find reasonable ways to help the producers,” Minier says. “We are being creative at each location realizing what works at one place may not work at another.”

Minier indicates that the program has been well-received by farmers in the western target area: Cheboygan, Otsego, Crawford, Antrim, Emmet and Charlevoix Counties. These counties comprise the proposed Modified Accredited Advanced Zone (MAAZ) Compartment 1 or Subzone 1. If accepted by USDA in the proposed MOU, this area would be broken out from the current Modified Accredited Zone (MAZ) and would thereby have a reduction in the amount of testing required.

“Producers who already have things in place to prevent the interface between cattle and deer are eager to see this program implemented,” Minier says. “The people taking it the hardest are those with a lot of risk and those that don’t have a business plan to reduce the risk.”

The MMPA field staff were trained at the farm of member Carl Reimann in Cheboygan. Carl, who raises dairy and beef cattle, signed up to take part in the program after attending one of the meetings.

“We want to be proactive with this,” Carl says. “We have not had a problem with TB in this area and we don’t want to. We are willing to do whatever we need to prevent getting TB.”

MDA has limited funding available to help offset some of the cost of wildlife risk mitigation for producers in the core bovine TB area. Reimbursement of 75 percent for fencing and 65 percent for feed storage hoop barns, up to \$15,000, is available. Funding is also available through the National Resources Conservation Services Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP).

Implementation of the Wildlife Risk Assessment is currently focused in Northeast Michigan, however all producers across the 13-county MAZ are encouraged to get involved. MMPA members in the area interested in conducting an on-farm assessment should contact their MMPA member representative.

Basic Wildlife Risk Mitigation Standards

Key Verification Points/MAZ Standards

1. Where cattle are pastured

Cattle are not permitted at any time to graze or feed in non-agricultural areas providing good deer cover or in swamps in the MAZ (e.g. an area with lots of shrubs).

Cattle may shelter in woodlots, but areas where there is good deer cover.

2. How often livestock which feed out of doors during the non-grazing season are fed

Cattle must be fed so that all feed is consumed on a daily basis or excess feed is regularly removed.

In situations where there are not enough cattle in a herd to consume a round bale in a single day, the cattle must be fed as close to the farm building as is practicable.

3. Where livestock which feed out of doors during the non-grazing season are fed

Cattle must be fed at least 100 yards from deer cover where practicable.

4. How grain and silage are stored

Grains and concentrates must be stored and regularly monitored to prevent access by deer. Silage and haylage must be protected from contamination from deer (e.g. bunkers, silos, tarps, fences, ag bags) and regularly monitored so as to prevent access by deer. Corrective measures must be implemented as needed to prevent access if deer intrusions are occurring.

5. How hay and forage are stored

Hay must be stored by November 15. Hay must be protected from contamination from deer (e.g. buildings, bunkers, silos, tarps, fences, ag bags) and regularly monitored to prevent access by deer. Corrective measures must be implemented as needed to prevent access if deer intrusions are occurring.

6. How and where livestock are watered

Cattle may water from either artificial watering systems or other approved low risk natural watering sources. Access to an artificial watering system is highly recommended year round.

7. How livestock commodities are managed

Waste or spoiled commodities must be land applied for disposal and be well spread so as to prevent wildlife congregation at a common food source in accordance with the Wildlife Conservation Act Normal Agricultural Practices and the Generally Accepted Agricultural and Management Practices (GAAMPS) for Nutrient Utilization.