

Brucellosis still threatens U.S. cattle herds

WASHINGTON - Reintroduction of brucellosis via cattle shipped from higher incidence areas is the main stumbling block preventing many states from reaching and retaining a zero infection level, reports a top U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) veterinarian.

Cattle brucellosis, often called Bang's disease, is a highly contagious disease of sexually mature animals. Humans as well as other animals may be affected. The economic consequences of this disease in cattle are evidenced by its symptoms: Abortion, retained placenta, birth of dead or weak calves, and a greatly extended calving interval.

Paul Becton, in charge of brucellosis eradication for USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, notes that 27 states are certified brucellosis-free; but only eight of these have no herds quarantined because of the disease.

Over 90 per cent of the cattle affected with brucellosis remaining in this

country are concentrated in 11 southeastern and south central states: Florida, Louisiana, Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri.

This leaves ten mountain and midwestern states with low infection rates, but not yet certified as brucellosis-free. Some of these states including Illinois, Iowa and Kansas have had so much trouble with reintroduction of brucellosis that they now require quarantining and retesting of cattle transported from designated U.S. problem areas.

Recent reports from Kansas indicate these restrictions are paying off. In a three-month period this year, animal health authorities in Kansas identified 20 shipped-in infected herds by quarantining cattle upon arrival and retesting them 45 to 90 days later.

The bulk of the shipments containing infected or exposed cattle were from the following: Mississippi (6),

Missouri (3), Alabama (2), Tennessee (2), and Texas (2). Arkansas and Louisiana accounted for one shipment

each with infection. The rest were combined shipments from two or more of the first four named states.

Generally, explained Becton, both state and federal rules prohibit shipping of brucellosis-affected or exposed cattle other than to slaughter plants or quarantined feedlots, either directly or by way of specifically approved stockyards. Also, any test-eligible breeding cattle moving from an area or lesser status to a certified brucellosis-free area must be tested and found negative within 30 days of shipment.

"The problem," said Becton, "is that one test may not be enough to reveal the presence of disease. This is because brucellosis has a rather long and variable incubation period. Most animals develop detectable antibodies within 30 to 60 days following exposure, but up to seven months have been reported in rare instances."

Becton, therefore, strongly recommends a second brucellosis test, preferably 60 to 120 days after the first. "A second negative test is far more

reassuring that the animals are not infected," he said.

Some certified brucellosis-free states have experienced problems with reintroduction of disease from the higher incidence states. On the West Coast, for instance, both California and Washington have had costly outbreaks within the past few years.

California has reacted by requiring that all imported dairy heifers be calfhood vaccinated; and they must enter the state accompanied by a permit and official health certificate.

To enter California, vaccinated dairy heifers over 20 months old also must be tested and be negative 30 days before entry. Testing and permit requirements are also a must for beef cattle entering the state.

California recently passed a tough but fair law telling cattlemen and dairymen whose herds are quarantined for brucellosis to cooperate in the eradication effort to pay the entire cost of eradicating the disease of their herds.

As of Jan. 1, 1979, only vaccinated dairy heifers may enter the state of

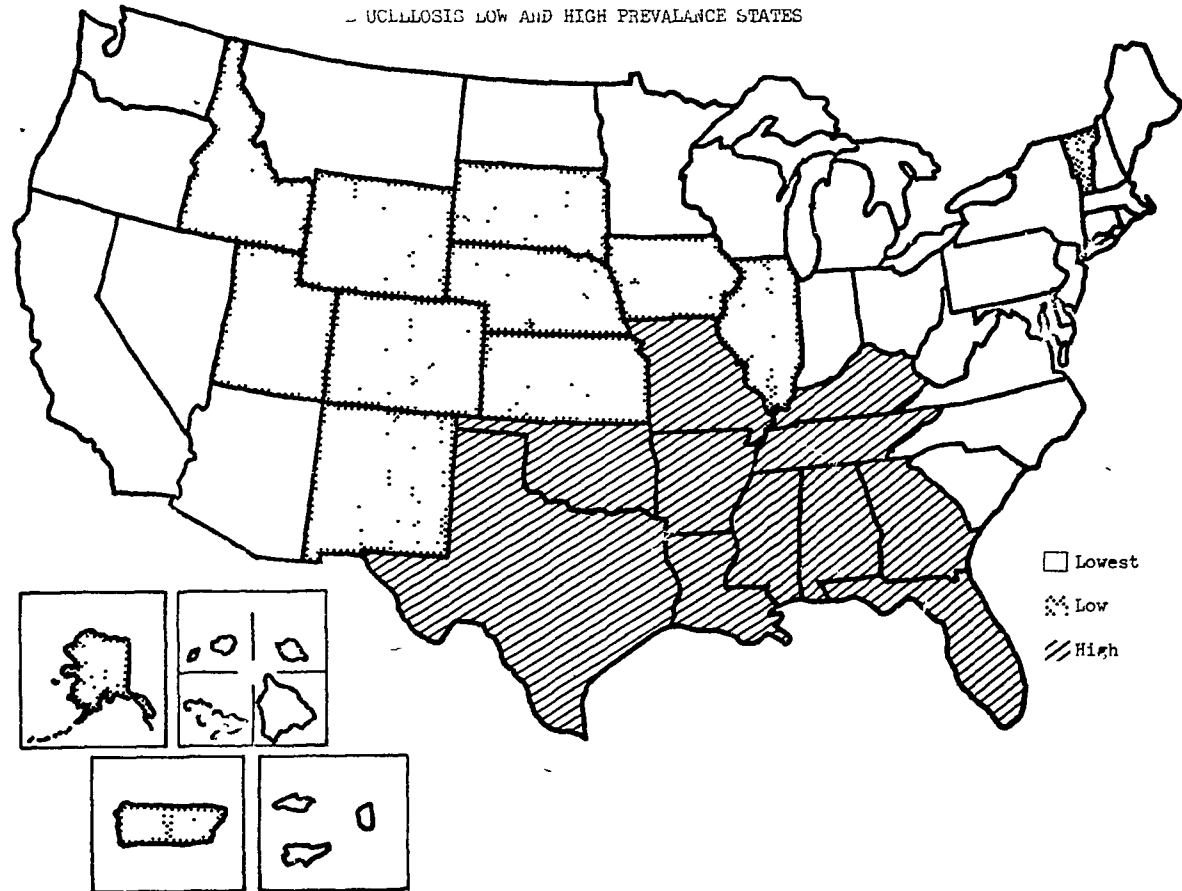
Washington. Beef or dairy breeding cattle entering Washington from less than certified brucellosis-free areas are quarantined upon arrival, and they must be retested within 30 to 60 days at the owner's expense.

In the northeast, Vermont for a short time prior to 1972 was completely free of brucellosis in its cattle population. Slowly, at first, Vermont began experiencing new outbreaks caused by diseased cattle entering from other areas. By January 1977, four Vermont counties had excessively high herd infection rates, resulting in their loss of certified brucellosis-free status.

Vermont was fighting back, however. The state strengthened its animal health rules and began waging a vigorous information campaign to better acquaint farmers with the brucellosis threat.

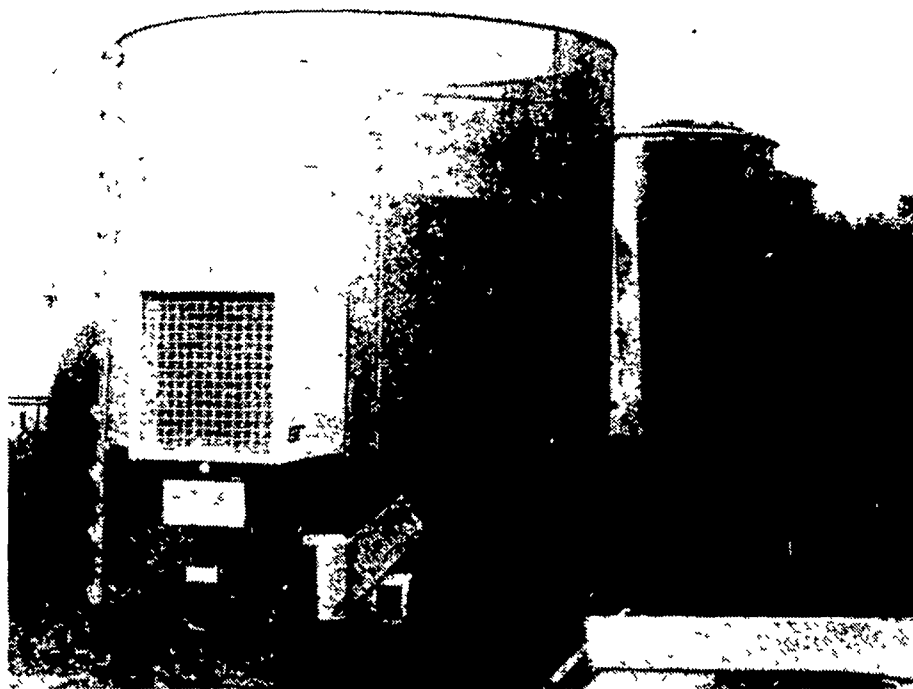
Campaign literature urged farmers to buy only negative tested cattle and to isolate newly purchased cattle for "a minimum of 30 days." Then, "every single pur-

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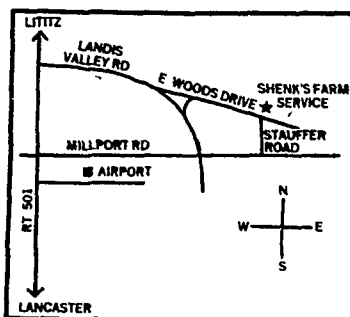
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