

# Rabies outbreak continues

(Continued from Page A1)

disease, just come in contact with the saliva," he adds.

A bill introduced in the House late last Fall by Franklin County legislator Rep. Terry Punt would make rabies vaccinations mandatory for dog licensing, with a \$500 fine levied against owners of unlicensed canines.

That bill, says Rep. Punt, came into being after discussion with individuals, animal-related groups and farmers who expressed concern over the high rate of rabies infections last year in Franklin County and surrounding areas.

House Bill 1700 as introduced would establish county clinics where pet owners could bring their pets for at-cost vaccinations, assist in the cost of injections for individuals deemed at high risk to rabies in their profession, and set up statewide programs for handling rabies reports and confirmation information.

Amendments and rewrites are anticipated as the bill moves through channels, Rep. Punt notes, including one that could give the Secretary of Health the option to concentrate resources on target areas where rabies problems arise.

Hearings on H.B. 1700 are scheduled for March 28 and 29.

A few isolated cases of rabies were confirmed last year in the state in large farm animals.

In one case, according to BAI's Dr. Cable, a raccoon walked into a milking parlor and bit a dairy cow on the leg. In another instance, a raccoon bit two cows as they entered a barn.

"Rabies causes a lot of fear and apprehension because people just don't know much about the disease," he says. "The virus is passed in the saliva of an infected animal and can enter the body through a break in the skin, or at the eyes."

Symptoms of rabies do not necessarily follow that classic idea of an animal foaming at the mouth. Instead, infected animals may appear very dull, or may show extremely abnormal behaviour, such as a nocturnal type wandering near buildings in mid-day.

Dr. Cable cites instances of wild animals reported to be coming within the range of dogs or entering doghouses or other out-

buildings from which they normally shy away.

With the approach of warmer weather, health officials fear escalating rabies reports, as cattle and horses are pastured, pets roam more widely, and the human populace takes to the outdoors.

They caution, repeatedly, against panic, and suggest that vaccinating domestic pets is one of the best preventive measures against rabies that can be taken.

According to the state vet, rabies is a seven-to-ten year cyclic disease, jumping periodically from species to species. He recounts a massive outbreak in Pennsylvania during the 1940's with about a thousand reported cases of rabies infections in dogs. Following a vigorous vaccination campaign, the epidemic subsided.

During the 1950's another rabies problem centered on the Commonwealth's fox population.

In the 1970's, areas of the South began reporting rabid raccoons, the beginning of the epidemic now posing a threat to Pennsylvania, after moving north about one hundred miles yearly.

Rabies outbreaks in Virginia reached a peak in 1982, when 745 cases were reported. Last year, Virginia's cases total 564.

In neighboring Maryland, the 152 cases in 1982 mushroomed to 717 cases during 1983, with signs this year pointing to a dropping rate of reports.

Joan Lewis, a spokesman for the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, explains that the state's rabies policy focuses primarily on prevention and education.

Maryland state law requires that all dogs receive rabies vaccinations, and numerous local jurisdictions require similar protection for cats. A public education drive on rabies awareness includes materials put into school to help children understand why wild animals must not be handled.

Anytime a rabies case is suspected, the head of the suspect animal must be sent to a state or state-approved laboratory for testing.

While testing on suspect cases in Maryland does continue, Lewis emphasizes that it is not being done unnecessarily. Only suspicious animals that have had

human contact are tested, not every animal picked up from along the roadside.

York agent Dobrosky echoes that Maryland policy, noting that the state labs would be overwhelmed with testing every dead animal found along the road. Only animals under suspect should be reported and tested.

Only a few farm animal rabies cases were found during Maryland's epidemic peak period, most of them cows that had been bitten by raccoons.

A new vaccine for rabies protection in large animals was just recently approved for use in the U.S. by the Food and Drug Administration. Distributed by the Pittman-Moore drug firm at Washington Crossing, N.J., the vaccine is produced at the Merieux Laboratory in Georgia, a division of the Merieux Institute in Lyon, France.

Used for many years in Europe, the rabies vaccine was initially approved for use on cats and dogs about a year ago, but just recently won USDA's approval for vaccinating horses, cattle and sheep.

While local vets have seen a marked increase in requests for vaccinations on cats and dogs, large animal vaccinations have been minimal.

Livestock owners are urged to seek professional help immediately if they have reason to suspect a rabies problem with an animal acting unduly aggressive, or markedly different from its usual behavior, and to inform their attending veterinarian of any rabies suspicions.

Extreme care is also recommended in disposing of any suspect dead animals, since rabies virus is so readily transmissible through open wounds to the skin.

For their own protection, some local veterinarians and clinic staffers have undergone the new human rabies protection vaccine program, which consists of three injections given at two-week intervals. Since a vial of that vaccine is adequate to treat eight persons at one time, and must be used immediately, some vets have joined forces with others in setting up programs for protecting themselves and their employees.

New protection and treatment drugs are less expensive and considerably less painful than medications available in the past.

## NIR to be displayed



This infrared scanner and computer will be displayed for the first time March 22 and 23 during the National Alfalfa Hay Quality Testing Workshop at the O'Hare/Kennedy Holiday Inn, Chicago. The scanner and computer determine in a few minutes the feeding quality of forage or grain. The workshop will seek adoption of national standards for testing alfalfa hay, using this equipment developed at Penn State in a process known as Near Infrared Reflectance. Penn State technician Mahlon E. Fetzger enters a pulverized alfalfa sample into the infrared scanner.

## Tobacco fee hiked

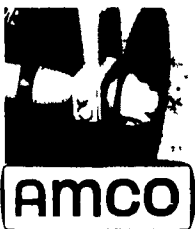
WASHINGTON, D.C. — As a condition for price support on 1984-crop cigar-binder types 51 (broadleaf) and 52

(Havana seed) tobaccos grown in Connecticut and Massachusetts, producers must agree to contribute 10 cents per pound to a no-net-cost account on all sales of these tobaccos, a U.S. Department of Agriculture official said today.

The 10-cents-per-pound contributions ensure the tobacco price support program is operated at no net cost to taxpayers as required by the No Net Cost Tobacco Program Act of 1982, according to Everett Rank, administrator of USDA's Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service.

The 3 cents per pound contributed last year by producers of Connecticut Valley types 51 and 52 tobaccos was not enough to cover expected losses from disposition of the 1982 and 1983 crops, because of the large quantity of tobacco placed under Commodity Credit Corporation loan in 1983, Rank said.

Also, Rank said, for types 51 and 52 tobacco placed under CCC price support loan in 1984, an additional 10 cents per pound will be deducted by the Conn-Mass Tobacco Cooperative, Incorporated, in Holyoke, Mass., to cover the cooperative's overhead costs.



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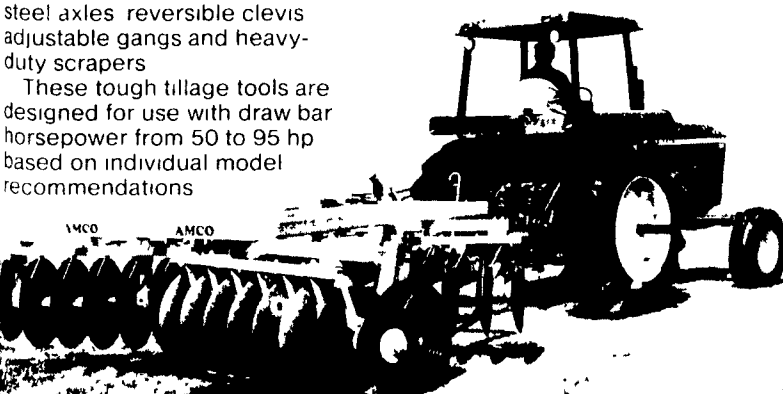
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