

Lancaster County Rabies Epidemic In Full Swing

BY PAT PURCELL

LANCASTER — "Lancaster County has the highest number of rabies cases in the state right now. There isn't much we can do about it, but let it run its course," said Pennsylvania Wildlife Conservation Officer Ted Fox.

The game commission is encouraging the public to take immediate precautions against the exposure to rabies and is discouraging people from taking animals to area labs for testing.

"The Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, the Department of Health and the Game Commission has been monitoring the spread of rabies. We already know we have a rabies epidemic. We don't need to see the numbers and the labs don't need the added strain," said Ed Gosnell, Wildlife Conservation Officer.

The bottom line in the rabies epidemic according to Fox and Gosnell, is making the public aware of the danger. Human exposure to rabies is fatal if not treated. There are precautions people should be taking.

"If you see a gun in the road you don't pick it up and spin the chamber around, put to your head and pull the trigger. People are out there playing Russian roulette with rabies," said Gosnell.

An animal infected with rabies will exhibit abnormal behavior. It

is unusual for animals which are usually out at night to be seen in the daylight, such as raccoons and skunks. Other signs are staggering, dumbness, docility, friendliness or sickness.

Gosnell cautions people to refrain from hiking in the woods and reminds the public to beware of docile and friendly wild animals. Aggressiveness is characteristic of animal in the final stages of rabies.

What To Do

Avoid all human contact with the suspected animal. Do not touch alive animal or a dead animal. If an animal wanders into the barnyard or yard and is a threat, Fox and Gosnell advice is to shoot it, pick it up with a shovel and bury it where it cannot be dug up by other animals.

"Don't call me to pick them up. If you find a dead animal in an area where children or pets may come in contact with it, bury it. Leave the shovel in the sun for a few hours to kill the virus," explained Gosnell. "But if an animal is acting sick and is in a field, stay away from the thing. This is not open season."

Rabies is not something that happens to someone else. In Lancaster County for January, February and March there is a total of 36 confirmed cases which include 4 dairy animals, 1 horse, 2 dogs, 25 raccoons, 1 ground hog, 1 fox, and

2 skunks. "People must realize that a dog allowed to run loose, although it has a vaccination can transfer rabies to humans if it comes into contact with a rabid animal and then a human makes contact with the dog's saliva," explained Gosnell. "People are asking for trouble. Feeding pets at night outside only entices wild animals to come in contact with pets."

Any possibility of human contact with rabies the victim should immediately contact the Game Commission or the local police. It is fatal if not treated immediately.

"There is nothing we can do to stop the spread of rabies. What we must do is make the public aware of the danger and urge them to take caution. No matter what we do, it will take its course just like a flu would," explained Fox. "It is very, very bad in our area and everyone should be very careful not to get themselves in precarious positions."

Dr. Gemmill, D.V.M. of the West Lancaster Animal Hospital, disagrees with the Game Commission and finds the state monitoring system lacking.

"The state monitoring of rabies stinks. In effect they are doing nothing. There is a very vigorous discouragement by the game commission to have suspected animals tested. There is a rabies epidemic and at this point people should

assume that every animal has rabies until proven otherwise.

"One of my technicians was recently having a picnic in Central Park when a skunk staggered out of the bushes in the midst of their picnic. Their solution was to shoot it and bury it," said Gemmill. "I believe the state is doing a real disservice by not doing more testing for rabies and know what real numbers are."

Bruce Reimer of the Pennsylvania State Health Department, said that any animal suspected of having rabies should be brought to a lab for testing.

"Any suspected case should be reported. We want an accurate testing. We do not want to be showing 33 reported cases in the county when in effect there are actually 83, and 50 have just not been reported. We must make the public aware of this very serious problem and we need to constantly re-emphasize the very real danger of exposure to rabies," said Reimer.

However, Gosnell and Fox agree, that whether there are 50 confirmed cases or 100 confirmed cases in the county, the bottom line is that there is a serious rabies epidemic in Lancaster County and that immediate precautions must be taken by all residents.

For farmers there is indemnity money available for livestock due to rabies, but it can only be collected if dogs and other pets have been vaccinated against rabies. This includes any animal kept in the house, but it does not include farm cats. Many people view this as a major flaw in the law.

"I don't have any explanation for it except that it's politics. People are putting themselves, their family and their animals at risk by not having their animals vaccinated. And if they are not vaccinated, such as the barn cats then they shouldn't be on the farm. Right now it is too big a risk," cautions Dr. Gemmill. "People who have dairy cattle can vaccinate their herd for less than five dollars an animal. It is an expense, but it will cost them much less than replacing the animal or going through treatment if exposed to it."

Gemmill reported that three veterinarians in the Lancaster area have been exposed to rabies and have undergone the treatments. According to the State Health Department, there rabies spread to a dairy animal in the Bainbridge area, and one member of that family is under going treatment. The most recent case confirmed by the department of health was a dairy cow in Peach Bottom.

FARM FORUM OUR READERS WRITE

Editor:

At a time like this, when area dairy farmers are on the threshold of receiving the lowest price for their milk since 1978; one would think that all elements of the dairy industry would be uniting their efforts in an attempt to correct the adversities facing dairy farmers. The current skirmish between Farmland Dairies and R.C.M.A. is extremely unfortunate. Can you imagine what we might be able to accomplish for dairy farmers if all the time, effort and money involved in this skirmish could be used to correct the real problems facing all of our dairy farmers.

I'm sure the dairy farmers currently shipping to Farmland Dairies are appreciative of the present 75 cent per cwt. premium being paid to them.

However, isolation or special premiums paid to a small sector of dairy farmers has never solved or come close to solving the over all problems.

Dairy industry leaders and most governmental officials have long recognized the need of marketwide pooling of milk within our federal milk marketing orders. In other words - give all dairy farmers within a marketing order an equal share of the market.

The philosophy of market wide pooling of all milk is the exact philosophy of R.C.M.A. The only difference with R.C.M.A. is —

1. They pool several markets together.

2. a) There is no premium on manufacturing milk

b) However, if the inequities facing dairy farmers are not corrected soon then attention must be given to establish a national premium on manufactured milk.

I have worked with various Farmland officials for nearly 20 years, and I must admit I am completely mystified by the position that Farmland Dairies has taken towards R.C.M.A.

I am even more mystified by

Farmland's reasons for their position.

Recently advertisements and news releases issued by Farmland attempt to indicate that R.C.M.A. has done little - if anything - to inform their members of R.C.M.A. activities.

Actually, during the last several months several letters have gone to the independent producers belonging to R.C.M.A. Up to this point, the larger dairy cooperatives have assumed the responsibilities of informing their own members regarding R.C.M.A. If the cooperatives have failed to do this then R.C.M.A. is not directly responsible.

Farmland claims they are unable to obtain answers from R.C.M.A. I know there have been at least one or two meetings between R.C.M.A. and Farmland. Surely some answers must have been obtained.

I remember calling Farmland during 1985 and 1986 and was told by their officials, "we will discuss anything with you except R.C.M.A." (You can't find out answers that way.)

Farmland claims that dairy farmers pay for the expenses of the Board of Directors - organizers, etc.

During 1985, 1986 and 1987, no Board member of R.C.M.A. received any expense reimbursement. During 1988 a Board member can have his expenses reimbursed for Board meetings.

Farmland claims that the army of R.C.M.A. organizers have received reimbursement for their expenses. This is an insult to the hundreds of independent dairy farmers that have gone from farm to farm all the way from Maine to the southern part of Pennsylvania. These farmers received nothing from R.C.M.A. During 1988, R.C.M.A. has finally been able to pay some expenses to a limited number of temporary part time organizers.

It would be nice to eliminate the need of public relation firms and attorneys; however, they are just as necessary for R.C.M.A. during a skirmish as they are to Farmland. Whatever these costs are - they don't come out of producers direct milk check, but come from the premium money.

The total cost of running R.C.M.A. is not deducted from producers milk check. The cost comes from the premium money.

Editor, it would take all of your paper to fully answer Farmland's accusations. Instead, I would like to outline a typical R.C.M.A. meeting where the program was explained to dairy farmers or any one else present. (see explanation of RCMA meeting).

Explanation of R.C.M.A. Meeting	Did It Happen?
1. The membership of R.C.M.A. will consist of co-op members and independent dairy farmers.	Yes
2. The Board of Directors of R.C.M.A. will consist of co-op directors and independent directors.	Yes
3. Independent producers will be assigned to a region.	Yes
4. The delegate body of R.C.M.A. will consist of independent and co-op delegates.	Yes
5. Monies from New England will be pooled with Order #2.	Yes Starting 11/1, 87
6. Cost of running R.C.M.A. will come from negotiated premiums -- not from producers milk checks.	Yes
7. Premium money will go to a special bank account under the supervision of a major accounting firm.	Yes
8. Premium money will be negotiated on fluid milk and not manufacturing milk for the present time.	Yes
9. If a milk handler fails to pay the premium, then the R.C.M.A. member's milk will be diverted.	Yes!
10. Example: negotiated premium	This formula still exists.
a) Supposing a \$1 per cwt. premium was collected on all fluid milk.	
b) Supposing the market had a 50% Class I utilization, then the paid premium would be	
$\frac{50\% \text{ fluid utilization}}{= 50 \text{ cent per cwt.}}$	
$- 3 \text{ cent per cwt. (administration cost)}$	
$47 \text{ cents -- price to producer}$	

These examples were used at all meetings that I attended across Pennsylvania.

I will not address Farmland's claims of their accomplishments in the marketplace, except that I recognize their importance of being there.

However, when they make the wild claim that they have not

turned away producers because of oversupply, certainly someone has a short memory down there.

I very well remember scores of Farmland producers being given their official notice between 1977 and 1980. Most of these producers ended up with Eastern Milk Producers.

I would like to have Marc Goldman come out and talk to some of his former producers that were turned over to Scheps Cheese during 1983, and in many cases it was done in one day's time. Ask a producer who lost \$40,000 by that transition if he would call it a "turning away."

Conclusion:

I recognize that Farmland was helpful in aiding farm organiza-

in South Waverly. And in addition, Eastern became responsible to handle a large volume of Farmlands spring surplus plus making milk available to Farmland during the "short season."

I think it is high time for Farmland to resolve their differences with R.C.M.A. I think it is time we work to improve milk prices to all farmers. We must collect premiums on 100% of all fluid milk and pool the receipts through R.C.M.A.

In addition, many of us will be working on the inequities that are responsible for the failing prices paid to all dairy farmers.

Arden Tewksbury
Meshoppen

Editor:

The discussion about RCMA is heating up and some normally levelheaded people are now saying we are "at war" with the Farmland Dairy and some other milk dealers who are refusing to pay over-order premiums charged by RCMA. We are NOT at war. War implies that we will wreak havoc and destroy our enemy. Milk dealers are not our enemies.

RCMA is disciplining Farmland Dairy and will proceed to do so with any other processor who refuses to pay a portion of the profits they are making from the consumers since the wholesale price of milk has declined. Retail prices of fluid milk in most of the Northeast US have remained strong, changing very little in the past few years. If some dealers do not wish to share those profits, we dairy farmers no longer wish to take whatever price we are offered, and therefore we are asking, through RCMA, for a fair portion of the difference between the widening wholesale and retail prices.

We are asking all dealers to pay the same fair premium, and they can offer anything above that amount in order to attract new supplies that they wish. We think it is

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