

Reducing the Risk of Bovine TB in Northern Michigan

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Source: *Michigan State University Extension FAS 113: Wildlife Risk*Assessment System for Bovine TB*

After reading the previous article *The Basics of Bovine TB* you may have a better understanding of the history and biology of bovine tuberculosis. It may also have caused you to wonder if enough is being done about it, or maybe just the opposite, aren't we doing enough already?

If we take a look at England and New Zealand we can see that when efforts to control and eliminate bovine TB are relaxed the disease rebounds with significant economic consequences. As a livestock producer you may be saying, "I test my cattle and do what I am supposed to. Isn't that enough?" If your farm is in northeast Michigan, the answer is no. One reason is that the bovine TB test is not 100 percent reliable. In fact, it is only 85 percent sensitive. In other words, out of a herd of 100 TB infected cattle up to 15 could test negative. This is because a newly infected cow will not respond to the TB test for at least 30 days and it will take 5 months for that cow to become infectious to other animals.

The second reason is that, although there are several measures in place to keep bovine TB from spreading among livestock, such as cattle movement permits, these stop the spread of the disease once the cattle have *already been infected*. Cattle producers need to keep in mind that their livestock are still at risk for contracting TB from wildlife on the farm. The Wildlife Risk Mitigation Project takes a proactive approach to this problem by reducing the risk of cattle getting infected from wildlife in the first place.

The Wildlife Risk Mitigation Project can be thought of as a "biosecurity plan" to reduce the risk of wildlife spreading bovine TB to cattle. This project brings producers and technical experts together to assess the risks of cattle contracting TB from wildlife on a farm, then develop and implement a Wildlife Risk Mitigation (WRM) Action Plan. Working together, the producer and technician assess general farm information, livestock feeding practices, feed storage, livestock watering sources and wildlife activity so a WRM Action Plan can be developed that is specific to each farm.

Many people do not understand that effects of a TB infected herd can reach beyond personal losses to a farmer. One infected animal leaving a TB area could have "a disastrous impact on that area's survivability as a cattle-producing area for years to come." Losses in markets occur as consumers lose confidence, and as a result these markets often dry up. The presence of TB in Michigan is a real threat to the "economic viability of the livestock industry." Taking steps on a farm like developing and implementing a WRM Action Plan not only helps to protect a producer's investment, but also helps to sustain the livestock industry in Michigan.

If you are a cattle producer interested in learning more about the Wildlife Risk Mitigation Project, please contact the Alpena Conservation District by calling (989) 356-3596 or visiting our office.