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Three-Year Bovine TB Risk Mitigation Project a Success

Conservation Districts & Staff Recognized for TB Efforts at Statewide Convention



Left to right - Gary O'Neill, Acting State Conservationist, USDA-NRCS; Randy Mellberg, Emily Sewell, Ken Parsons, Ken Papes, Jim Johnson, Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

Lansing – The Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD), in collaboration with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Wildlife Services (WS), and four Michigan Conservation Districts (CDs) have successfully reached their three-year goal of protecting Michigan cattle farms in the highest risk areas for bovine Tuberculosis (TB).

The \$3.6 million project is a combined effort between Michigan's cattlemen, local conservation districts, state and federal government agencies, and Michigan State University Extension to aid producers with their risk mitigation methods in northern lower Michigan.

“Wildlife Risk Mitigation Plans are required in order for farms to sell cattle without follow-up testing. These plans use fencing and other management techniques designed to keep wild white-tailed deer, which are known reservoirs for bovine TB, from contaminating feed and water sources on cattle farms in Northern Lower Michigan,” said Dr. Rick Smith, MDARD’s Wildlife Risk Mitigation Program (WRMP) Coordinator.

“We were pleased to learn the Alpena Conservation District and staff received special recognition for their outstanding efforts in delivering the Wildlife Risk Mitigation Project,” Smith said. “We could not have accomplished our goal of implementing the WRM Initiative on Michigan cattle farms without their help.”

The Alpena Conservation District (CD) and staff accepted the awards during the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts Annual Convention awards banquet on December 8, 2011. Alpena Conservation District's Randall Mellberg and Emily Sewell, TB Conservationists in the Alpena CD office, were specifically recognized for their outstanding contributions to the development and implementation of WRMP in the state.

"We're extremely appreciative of Randy and Emily's contributions; and those of all the Conservation District staff," said Pete Butchko, Michigan's USDA WS State Director. "Working together works!"

Wildlife Risk Mitigation was an initiative of both USDA Wildlife Services and MDARD in early 2003. Pilot projects conducted by USDA's scientists on cervid facilities and cattle farms in northern Michigan found that tools such as fencing, hay storage units, and the use of dogs lowered the risk of disease transmission. MDARD began the official sign-up program in 2009, and since then nearly 900 cattle producers have participated in the Wildlife Risk Mitigation Project to assess their on-farm risks and complete biosecurity plans. Ninety-four percent have become risk mitigated.

In addition to completing risk assessments and biosecurity plans, Mellberg and Sewell have facilitated the construction and cost-sharing of 65 feed security hoop barns and a handful of fencing projects in Alpena, Alcona, Montmorency, and Presque Isle counties. To date, livestock producers have accessed more than \$1.2 million in assistance funding, and have invested an additional \$401,000 of personal funds in improvement to farm biosecurity.

Earlier in 2011, Michigan U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow secured \$1.5 million in funding for cattle producers in 11 counties (Alcona, Alpena, Antrim, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, Crawford, Emmet, Montmorency, Oscoda, Otsego, and Presque Isle) in the Northern Lower Peninsula through the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Producers match these funds with 25 percent of their own money.

Additionally, Kenneth Parsons, a Conservation Technical Assistance Initiative (CTAI) Specialist in the Alpena CD office; and Kenny Papes, a CTAI Engineer in the Otsego CD office, were recognized for their efforts to significantly increase the number of producers signing up for federal EQIP funding.

Parsons and Papes completed their work associated with the TB Initiative/EQIP sign-up under short deadlines. The efforts provided financial and technical assistance to cattle producers with the implementation of conservation practices and strategies designed to reduce the spread of Bovine TB. Enrollment in EQIP has helped cattle producers move toward becoming Risk Mitigated and in maintaining their market access.

Conservation practices funded with Bovine TB Initiative/EQIP funds include: brush management, cattle access control, cattle trails and walkways, fencing, forage harvest management, heavy use area protection, pasture and hayland planting, prescribed grazing, roof runoff structures, stream crossings, underground outlets, water pipelines, water tanks, waste facility cover, waste storage facilities, wells and windbreaks. All of the \$1.5 million in funding was allocated; and 87 livestock producers' EQIP contracts were approved for implementation. Some conservation practices were completed in 2011 and others will be completed in 2012.

The 14,000 cattle producers in Michigan, which maintain 1.2 million beef and dairy animals, benefit from the Bovine TB Eradication and Wildlife Risk Mitigation Programs because transmission of the disease is prevented, thus allowing access to national and international markets. In 2011, 57 Lower Michigan counties joined the Upper Peninsula in obtaining Bovine TB-Free Status.

For more information on the Wildlife Risk Mitigation Project, visit www.michigan.gov/emergingdiseases .