

Federal Restrictions Hit Minn. Livestock

(Associated Press, MN)

New federal restrictions meant to prevent the spread of bovine tuberculosis may force the state's livestock producers to spend more time and money shipping their cattle and bison out of state.

The new restrictions take effect Wednesday. State officials had been gearing up for them since the discovery of another infected herd in February.

The restrictions will not affect animals going to slaughter or coming from herds certified as TB-free. But other animals being shipped out of state -- primarily feeder cattle, breeding stock and replacement dairy cows -- will have to pass tests first.

State agriculture officials told reporters in a conference call Tuesday that they're working to exempt most of the state from the restrictions except for part of northwestern Minnesota. The process will take until at least sometime this fall.

Bovine TB turned up in northwestern Minnesota in 2005, and officials have found 11 infected cattle herds since then. The discovery of the latest infected herd in February triggered the latest move.

"This is a tough situation for everybody to deal with, but I think everyone in the state, not just within northwestern Minnesota, recognizes the significance of this disease, that it does require an aggressive action," said Joe Martin, the state's newly appointed bovine TB coordinator.

Consumers "are at very little risk" of contracting tuberculosis from drinking milk or eating beef, Martin stressed. Pasteurization kills the bacteria, and the state does not allow the sale of raw milk, he said.

TB rarely appears in muscle cuts of beef, but all cattle are inspected at slaughter and any showing signs of TB are condemned, he said, adding that cooking also kills the bacteria.

Martin said Minnesota ships between 200,000 and 250,000 cattle to other states annually that will be subject to the new restrictions. The tests typically cost between \$5 and \$10 per animal, he said, plus whatever a veterinarian charges to come out to a farm and perform them.

The Minnesota Board of Animal Health is in the process of applying to the U.S. Department of Agriculture for "split state status," which would create a special zone where the disease has been found. That would lift restrictions on the majority of the state's producers, who are outside the zone.

Other states are free to establish tighter restrictions on Minnesota cattle than the federal requirements. North Dakota and Wisconsin already have. Because rules can change

quickly, the officials recommended that producers shipping cattle out of state call their veterinarians or the other states for their current requirements.

Last week, the U.S. Department of Agriculture approved \$2.7 million in emergency funding to fight bovine TB in Minnesota. The money will be used to eliminate infected herds and for extra surveillance of deer, which can spread the disease between farms. The legislature is also debating additional funding.