



From Fever Ticks to Feral Swine Protecting Texas' Animal Agriculture

BY WALLACE EUGENE "GENE" SNELSON II

Since its creation in 1893 to fight a Texas cattle fever epidemic, the Texas Animal Health Commission has focused on controlling or eradicating diseases in agricultural animals. Texas is the largest agricultural animal state — it ranks at the top, or near the top, of all major agricultural animal classifications in the United States. The commission has operated a variety of disease programs for the purpose of protecting and promoting the various agricultural animal industries.

In addition to fighting disease, the commission also establishes and enforces testing and documentation requirements for agricultural animals entering the state. The agency provides herd certification programs that allow these animals to move interstate or to be sold easier. There are disease protection programs, such as feral swine holding facilities, swine garbage feeding operations, and fowl registration.

Since 1993, the commission has operated a feral swine holding facility program with the intent to protect domestic swine from diseases associated with feral swine. The commission's regulations basically apply to anyone who traps and transports live feral swine from the premises or location where they were trapped. It requires the registration of any-

one who confines feral swine and limits where live feral swine can be transported. The commission's authority is limited to this program and does not interfere with the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's authority to regulate the hunting and trapping of feral swine. The Fowl Registration Program was created to register fowl sellers, distributors, or transporters who do not participate in disease surveillance programs recognized by the commission.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture operates several disease eradication programs that are cooperative state-federal efforts directed at eradicating the presence of the disease within the United States. States are assigned a status according to the number of infected animals found within a state. The desired status, for all disease eradication programs, is a classification that a state is free of the presence of that disease. Generally, a free status is obtained when none of the susceptible species are found to be infected for a specific number of consecutive months under an active surveillance program. A state can lose its status if a specific number of infected herds or flocks are detected within a specific timeframe. Because of the large numbers of the various agriculture animals within the state, as well as those entering, Texas



has been one of the last states to achieve a declaration of free status for all of the eradication programs. While eradication programs have federal direction, a control program is generally for the purpose of identifying infection and protecting others' exposure. Control programs are generally at the creation of the state, which defines the extent of the program.

The first eradication program began with efforts to control the spread of the fever tick and the disease. Today, there is an ongoing eradication program, including a permanent fever tick quarantine zone from Del Rio to Brownsville. Unfortunately, recent studies have shown free-ranging deer also serve as host for these ticks and that, along with the difficulty of effective cardicide options, make the eradication of the fever tick very difficult.

Livestock and wildlife are subject to a variety of highly contagious, foreign animal diseases (FAD). A FAD may be extremely difficult to identify, isolate, control, and eradicate. Texas also has unique animal disease risks associated with its size and borders. Texas imports more live animals than any other state, including approximately 1 million cattle per year from Mexico and approximately 2.5 million cattle from other U.S. states.

Bovine tuberculosis (TB) was the most prevalent infectious disease of cattle and swine in the United States when that eradication program began in 1917 — about 5 percent of the nation's cattle were known to be infected. Texas originally gained its TB-free status in 2000, but lost it in 2002. The state tested nearly 2,800 Texas cattle herds, including all the dairy herds in the state, in order to regain "free status" in October 2006.

The U.S. bovine brucellosis eradication program was started in 1934, when brucellosis was widespread throughout United States. In 1959, when Texas officially joined the national eradication program, it had more than 20,000 of the country's 100,000 infected herds. Texas achieved cattle brucellosis-free status in February 2008.

Bovine trichomoniasis is a venereal disease of cattle. In 2008, a group of industry representatives gathered and discussed the need for a control program. A trichomoniasis control program was developed and implemented on Jan. 1, 2010. The program requires that breeding stock be certified as virgin bulls or tested for trichomoniasis for a change of ownership.

Scrapie affects sheep and goats and is a member of a family of diseases known as the transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSE), which include bovine spongiform encephalopathy (mad cow disease) and chronic wasting disease (CWD) in deer and elk. This is the most recent federal-state cooperative eradication program, as it commenced in 2002.

Chronic wasting disease (CWD) is a TSE of elk and deer. The commission operates a CWD herd certification program that gives an animal status for interstate and sales purposes. White-tail and mule deer breeders are regulated through TPWD and participate in a CWD herd certification program. However, elk are classified as exotic livestock and considered private property in Texas. Legislation was recently passed that allowed the commission to require participation of elk in a CWD surveillance program. Working through an industry

work group, regulations were recently implemented on Jan. 1, 2010, requiring anyone who transports live elk within the state to either participate in a monitored herd program or have a valid not-detected CWD test result, prior to movement.

Equine infectious anemia (EIA) is a control program for equine as it is an infectious and potentially fatal viral disease of horses. The commission has requirements for the testing of all exposed equine and segregating test-positive horses from those with negative test results. Once positive horses are identified, separated, and maintained a safe distance from the other horses, the transmission of EIA is broken.

The commission is actively involved in emergency response activities with all TAHC field personnel thoroughly trained in emergency response capabilities. The commission's emergency response abilities serve as a model for other states to improve their capability to provide critical intelligence, preparedness, and response to a FAD, as well as natural disasters. TAHC also supports counties and cities in planning for shelter and rescue of animals during disasters. The commission serves to protect the Texas agricultural animals by being prepared and responsive.

WALLACE EUGENE "GENE" SNELSON II

is general counsel to the Texas Animal Health Commission in Austin.

TLPP

Texas Legal Protection Plan
Legal Issues? We've got you covered.

Texas Legal Protection Plan (TLPP) is a non-profit group legal insurance plan created through the State Bar of Texas in 1972. TLPP offers attorneys a smart and trusted partnership to help build, grow and manage their business. [Check us out online! www.tlpp.org](http://www.tlpp.org)

Contact TLPP for more information:
Mary Regalado-Poole
Attorney Services
(512) 327-1372 x115 Office • (512) 327-0163 Fax
mpoole@tlpp.org
7500 Rialto Boulevard
Building 1, Suite 120 • Austin, TX 78735