

Mackay, Christian

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Montana Farm Bureau praises BOL on new brucellosis rule

The state's largest agricultural organization, Montana Farm Bureau Federation, commends the Montana Board of Livestock's (BOL) new official rule on controlling brucellosis in the state, which picks up where the state's recently expired Brucellosis Action Plan left off. Over the past two years, MFBF expressed its concern regarding the Brucellosis Action Plan and encouraged the BOL to adopt brucellosis management programs that were effective yet economically feasible and less onerous on cattle ranchers.

"We want to thank the Board of Livestock for passing the rule earlier this week that is an even-handed and responsible way of addressing the concerns that Montana Farm Bureau and its members raised during the brucellosis comment process," said Jake Cummins, MFBF executive vice president. "This is a brucellosis management plan that will help Montana protect and maintain its brucellosis class-free status while addressing the cost to producers and setting a manageable and specific set of rules."

Specifically, the rule removes the requirement for the annual herd test for all producers and now requires a blood test need only be done when any rancher sells heifers or cows. Heifers and cows in the Designated Surveillance Area (DSA), although still needing to be tested, will be tested using the MCI federal testing program, which has been in place for years. There will be a change of ownership test required, as well.

In addition, calves in the DSA (Beaverhead, Madison, Gallatin and Park counties) will need to be vaccinated; however, they only need to be vaccinated by January 1, giving producers sufficient time after calving to administer the vaccine.

MFBF is pleased that a decision has been made on non-compliance enforcement. According to the new rule, someone in violation of the rule will be charged with a misdemeanor. MFBF had stressed in its earlier comments that although the rules needed teeth to be enforceable, the enforcement must also be reasonable and not overly restrictive.

"Our comments to the BOL and the federal Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) stressed the fact the only reservoir of brucellosis-infected wildlife existing in the United States is in the Greater Yellowstone Area," notes Cummins. "The fact that the BOL, and in turn, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, has formally recognized this is a huge step in the right direction to permanently eradicate the disease. We have always been concerned about the huge financial and management burden their proximity to this reservoir places on our livestock producers. We are very pleased many of our concerns are being addressed in the BOL's new rule."