

News Release

For Immediate Release

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MILESTONE REACHED FOR MS CATTLE INDUSTRY: MISSISSIPPI CERTIFIED BRUCELLOSIS - FREE

(Jackson) More than 40 years after joining a program to fight against it, Mississippi cattlemen have achieved a major victory over one of the industries' most devastating diseases. "After years of hard work by cattlemen, state and federal officials and veterinarians, Mississippi has achieved 'Class Free' status in the National Brucellosis Eradication Program," says Mississippi Agriculture Commissioner Lester Spell, Jr. "This means that none of Mississippi's approximately 29,000 cattle herds have tested positive for this disease within the last 12 months."

Brucellosis is an infectious and contagious bacterial disease that primarily affects cattle. Cows infected with the disease often abort calves during the last third of the pregnancy or produce weakened calves. However, an affected cow can show no outward signs of the disease and produce healthy offspring, which makes tracking the disease extremely difficult. For that reason, the value of an entire herd of cattle drops dramatically if a single infection is found. Brucellosis once affected almost one-third of the cattle herds in the United States, and government agencies have spent an estimated \$3.5 billion fighting the disease since 1951.

"The cattlemen are the real winners," says Sammy Blossom, Executive Director of the Mississippi Cattlemen Association. "We have reached a milestone in our battle against brucellosis and, hopefully, we're on the verge of eradicating it. Cattlemen have taken tremendous losses over the years because of this disease."

Economic benefits of the brucellosis-free status include:

- Enhanced market value for cattle
- Freer interstate and international movement
- Elimination of costs associated with protecting a herd from becoming infected

(More)

Mississippi is the 43rd state to be certified as free of brucellosis. It is in the middle of the states in the southern United States that were once known as the “Brucellosis Belt,” so it was especially difficult to overcome the disease. “As in every eradication program, the last cases of a disease are hardest to find,” says Chester A. Gipson, Director of Operational Support Staff for the Brucellosis Eradication Program. “It is hard to believe now, but in 1957 nearly 3,500 affected herds were found in Mississippi. By October 1987, that number was down to 118.

Although the designation is welcome, it is not permanent. State Veterinarian Dr. Jim Watson says the battle against brucellosis will continue. “This new status doesn’t mean we can relax and stop doing the things that have gotten us to this point,” says Watson. “We want to continue to encourage our farmers to calfhood vaccinate their heifers, and we will continue to monitor for the disease by continuing to test all test-eligible cattle at the salebarns for the next two years. We have worked hard to get to this point and want to make sure nothing happens to jeopardize our current status.”