

# **Texas Animal Health Commission**

## **How the Agency was Started**

In the mid-1800s, producers in northern states were not sure why, but they recognized a correlation between Texas cattle driven northward in the summer and massive death losses in northern cattle resulting from the disease, called Spanish Fever, Bovine Malaria, Yellow Murain, and Texas Fever.

Unknowingly, Texas cattle carried fever ticks northward to cattle that had no resistance to Texas "Tick Fever," or "babesiosis," the protozoal blood disease transmitted by infected fever ticks. Affected animals ran fever, lost their appetite, became depressed, and sometimes were unable to stand. Cattle soon developed diarrhea, a rapid pulse, and bloody urine before they died three to seven days later. Nearly 90 percent of infected cattle suffered an agonizing death, and the few surviving animals became anemic and emaciated, causing a dramatic drop in value. Crippling economic losses prompted northern producers to ban Texas cattle from moving to their states during warm-weather months.

Producers rallied against the pest after three U.S. Department of Agriculture veterinarians in 1888-89 discovered the common cattle tick could spread the microscopic protozoa that caused the tick fever. About the same time, Mr. Robert J. Kleberg of the King Ranch in South Texas and Dr. Mark Frances of Texas A&M College developed a lime-sulphur dip to eliminate scabies, a mite that causes itching and mange. Mr. Kleberg, credited with building the first dipping vat in the U.S., saw that many ticks died after the dipping. He informed U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Rusk, "Mr. Secretary, if the tick carries the disease, as your investigation seems to show, I will get rid of the tick."

On February 26, 1892, fever tick outbreaks were rampant, and the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture quarantined seven states, and parts of Texas and five other states. Cattle destined for any purpose other than slaughter could be shipped northward from restricted regions only between November 15 and February 15.

Cattlemen recognized the crippling financial effects of the quarantines and turned to the Texas legislature, urging the creation of an agency like the U.S. Bureau of Animal Industry, which had been set up in 1884. The 23rd Texas Legislature, in 1893, passed S.H.B. No. 112, establishing the Livestock Sanitary Commission, the original name of the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC).

New law provided for protecting domestic livestock from dangerous or contagious diseases; establishing quarantine lines, rules and regulations; and setting penalties for violations. Governor James Stephen Hogg appointed three commissioners to head the new agency. Taking on two-year terms were Robert J. Kleberg of Corpus Christi, T. J. Martin of Midland, and W. J. Moore of Galveston. A \$20,000 appropriation funded the agency's first biennium, from which commissioners received \$5 a day for official duties. They also were authorized to hire a veterinarian, provided they spent no more than \$10 a day, or \$900 a year.

Initially headquartered in Quanah, the agency soon was moved to Fort Worth, where the Texas Cattle Raisers' Association provided space rent-free. Across the South, the race was on; chemical preparations were sprayed, rubbed, dabbed and brushed on cattle, in an attempt to kill ticks but not the animal. Sadly, ticks often fared better than cattle.

Mr. Kleberg provided facilities for trying experimental dips, and during a five-year span, 25,000 tick-infested cattle were passed through the vat to test the killing power of various concoctions. In 1897, the Fort Worth Stockyards built a large dipping vat for additional chemical trials.

That same year, livestock commissioners from several states and representatives of the U.S. Bureau of Animal Industry set uniform methods for tick inspection and quarantining stock. They formed the "Interstate Association of Livestock Sanitary Boards," which evolved into the U.S. Animal Health Association. This group continues to influence the development federal livestock regulations.

By 1903, a dipping solution of arsenic, sal soda and pine tar was recommended. This demonstrated little success in slowing U.S. cattle losses, which in 1906 were reported at \$40 million per year, plus another \$33 million in reduced cattle values in the South. Strong-minded cattlemen convinced Congress to appropriate \$82,500 to support tick eradication in Southern states.

When the national program kicked off in 1906, quarantines had been slapped on 198 Texas counties, along with 729 counties in other southern states. In 1911 an arsenical dip, based on an Australian formula used in Cuba, was selected as the "official dip." Within five years, 127 counties and portions of 20 others had been released from quarantine, due to the successful efforts by livestock producers and regulatory personnel.

Today, fever ticks are eradicated from the U.S. However, portions of eight South Texas counties remain under permanent surveillance by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service in order to apprehend and treat any fever tick-infested animals that may cross the Rio Grande. Coumaphos, or "Co-Ral" is used in vats in the permanent quarantine zone, and cattle are dipped, and horses are sprayed prior to being moved from the zone. Fever tick inspectors check each animal leaving the zone, and TAHC inspectors routinely collect ticks at markets, ranches and feedlots to ensure that dangerous ticks have not moved into the state.