



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Marketing and  
Regulatory  
Programs

Washington, DC  
20250

August 7, 2018

The Honorable Sid Miller  
Commissioner  
Texas Department of Agriculture  
Post Office Box 12847  
Austin, Texas 78711

Dear Commissioner Miller:

As you are aware, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) established a Permanent Quarantine Zone (PQZ) under the Cattle Fever Tick Eradication Program (CFTEP) to prevent the spread and re-establishment of the Cattle Fever Tick (CFT) in the United States. USDA and the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) have cooperatively administered the CFTEP since it was created in 1906. The PQZ is approximately a 500-mile buffer zone between Mexico and the rest of the U.S. to protect the entire U.S. cattle industry from the re-establishment of the CFT. USDA values the long-standing cooperation with TAHC, the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA), and producers to mitigate the devastating impact the CFT has on livestock and stream of commerce.

The CFT poses severe health risks to cattle and carries microscopic parasites that attack and destroy red blood cells causing acute anemia, high fever, and enlargement of the spleen and liver resulting in mortality of up to 70-90% in infected cattle. In addition to the devastating health impacts on cattle and various wildlife, the CFT also creates significant economic burdens to U.S. cattle producers operating within or around the PQZ. This economic impact, coupled with the treatments required to eradicate the CFT once established, are expensive and burdensome on the cattle industry. We estimate that if the CFT were to re-establish its historical range in the United States, the U.S. cattle industry could face losses of approximately \$1.5 billion annually.

As part of our multi-faceted strategy to mitigate the health and economic impacts, as well as the potential spread of CFT, USDA-APHIS and TAHC deploy a suite of treatment options available to producers seeking to transport their livestock out of the PQZ in order to participate in commerce. One of those critical options, which is intended to mitigate the stress on animals and the economic burden on producers, includes the use of spray boxes. USDA has treated cattle in spray boxes with various pesticides since the 1970s to assist in the eradication of the CFT.

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Producers retain the option to truck their cattle to dipping stations staged throughout the PQZ; however, many producers prefer treating their cattle in spray boxes to mitigate costs and reduce the stress on their animals, especially during the hot summer months. The portable spray boxes allow producers within the PQZ, who may choose not to transport their cattle or may not have readily available access to dipping vats, an alternative method of treatment to facilitate their ability to move their cattle out of the PQZ and participate in commerce.

We learned through social media postings that TDA has issued a "Stop Use" order on or about July 31, 2018, preventing the continued operation of USDA-APHIS and TAHC spray boxes. The Department wishes to express significant concern if TDA's action prohibits or limits the use of this valuable, safe, and effective tool in the cattle fever tick program.

Several cattle producer groups, livestock organizations, and other impacted stakeholder sent the enclosed letter to USDA and the Texas Congressional delegation on August 4, 2018, stating their strong concern over TDA's recent actions and enumerating their support for the continued use and deployment of spray boxes as a critical tool under the CFTEP.

USDA is committed to working collaboratively with TDA, TAHC, and the impacted producers to ensure the availability of as many tools and treatment options as practicable to assist in the continued efforts to eradicate the CFT and reduce the regulatory burdens on producers seeking to participate in commerce outside of the PQZ.

USDA stands ready to assist TAHC, TDA, and our stakeholders in this process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Watson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and a long, sweeping underline.

Michael Watson  
Associate Administrator  
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service