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LADB Staff

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U.S. Bans Cattle from Two Mexican States Following Outbreak of Bovine TB

by LADB Staff
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The US government has imposed an embargo on imports of live cattle and other livestock from Durango and Chiapas states because of an outbreak of bovine tuberculosis in some areas of the two states. The USDA has also imposed limited restrictions on cattle from 15 other Mexican states, requiring producers from certain regions to submit paperwork proving that cattle are free of TB.

The US restrictions, announced in late May, will remain in place indefinitely. To resume exports to the US, livestock producers in the two states will have to take a series of steps, from quarantining infected and at-risk animals to comprehensive testing, said the US Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), a division of the US Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The APHIS' strict requirements have raised strong concerns within the Durango cattle industry because the required quarantine and testing could take as long as a year. Closing the border will force producers in Durango to sell about 40,000 head of cattle on the domestic market during the next four months. This could result in losses of about 80 million pesos (US$7.4 million), said David Avitia Torres, president of the Union Ganadera Regional de Durango (UGRD). Durango exports an average of 150,000 head of cattle to the US annually.

The UGRD said APHIS imposed the restrictions because a handful of dairy cattle were transported through a region of Durango where bovine TB had been detected. As a result, the state’s entire cattle industry, comprising 45,000 producers, is being punished. "It's not fair, because most of us made sure that we had clean cattle," said Avitia. "This is our livelihood."

Restrictions cause local prices to plummet

The restrictions on Durango cattle exports caused local prices in Mexico to fall because of the potential increase in supplies on the domestic market. The UGRD said prices for cattle in the state declined to 20 pesos (US$1.85) per kg from 30 pesos (US$2.77) per kg before the APHIS restrictions were announced. There is some concern that bovine TB may also affect sheep herds in Durango, which prompted the US to expand its embargo to include sheep.

Durango agriculture authorities said they are working with APHIS to implement some health measures that will result in removing restrictions on sheep. In Chiapas, news of the US embargo, imposed on that state on June 1, also caused local prices to plummet to about 17 pesos (US$1.57) per kg from 22.50 pesos (US$2.08) per kg previously.

State animal-health authorities said they are working to isolate the cattle in areas where bovine TB has been detected. They said the US restrictions are unwarranted. "We have worked to comply with all the [APHIS] requirements," said Chiapas rural development secretary Javier Ruiz Morales.
In addition to Chiapas and Durango, the US has announced tighter requirements on cattle imports originating from selected regions of Colima, Quintana Roo, Sinaloa, Tamaulipas, Yucatan, Aguascalientes, Baja California, Campeche, Coahuila, Chihuahua, Nayarit, Nuevo Leon, Puebla, Zacatecas, and Jalisco states.

US Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns said he is working closely with his Mexican counterpart Javier Usabiaga to implement the necessary measures to have the restrictions lifted. "[Secretary Usabiaga] fully understands the safety concerns that prompted our action," Johanns said in a statement. "He also expressed his appreciation for our willingness to assist Mexico with corrective measures so we can resume normal trade with Durango." [Note: Peso-dollar conversions in this article are based on the Interbank rate in effect on June 15, reported at 10.80 pesos per US$1.00] (Sources: Spanish news service EFE, Notimex, Associated Press, 05/24/05; Frontenet-Ciudad Juarez, Reuters, 06/01/05; Agencia de noticias Proceso, 05/25/05, 06/01/05, 06/02/05; El Universal, 06/01/05, 06/02/05; La Jornada, 05/25/05, 06/08/05)

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