

Experience with TB

Two Minnesota beef producers share what it's like to raise cattle in a state that has lost its TB-free status.

Story by
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Bovine tuberculosis (TB) has had its fair share of headlines during the last several months. Presently, California, Michigan, New Mexico and Minnesota have all lost their TB-free status, with

Oklahoma and North Dakota each having reported a case in recent years. Thus, concern over the highly transmissible disease — which can be transferred by infected deer or cattle — is ramping up with efforts under way to try to eradicate it.

Angus Productions Inc. (API) visited

with two beef producers in Minnesota who are adjusting to the additional testing and biosecurity measures required of them since the state's TB-free status was taken away in April 2008.

Steve Haugen and his wife, Deon, purchased their ranch near Roseau, Minn., in 1984 and operate an Angus-

based commercial herd of about 270 cows. The cows are split into two herds for fall and spring calving, and they also raise their own crops, which are then used as feed to background calves from their herd.

Kelly Nordlund and his wife, Linda Lee, have been raising registered cattle on their ranch at Clearbrook, Minn., since 1972. Presently, they run about 260 black and red Angus and some Simmental cows, with calving split between spring and fall. Sons Mike and Sam are involved in the operation, and the family holds an on-farm production sale offering bulls and females each February.

Here, Haugen and Nordlund answer our questions.

What is the current requirement for TB testing in Minnesota, and who pays for it?

In October 2008, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) granted Minnesota "Split State Status." This means that a large part of the state was able to upgrade its classification to Modified Accredited Advanced (MAA), where testing is primarily required only if moving animals to another state, while a smaller section of northwestern Minnesota has remained in the Modified Accredited (MA) classification and has more stringent requirements.

Haugen reports that he is in that MA region. He is required to test the entire herd once annually, and any animals that will be sold need to be tested within 60 days of the sale date. Because he is in the

MA region, the state does pay for the testing, but Haugen notes that the additional time to do testing takes away from other ranch projects and is extra wear and tear on chutes and corrals.

In the MA zone, movement certificates are also needed anytime livestock are trailered and moved. This includes when cattle are being hauled to market and even hauling cows from one pasture to another. Haugen says this year the state will be providing electronic identification (EID) tags for all cattle that have been tested in the MA region. He says this should help make the movement certificate process easier because the EID tags can be used to capture the official numbers of each animal. The Haugens already had the additional equipment to read the EID tags.

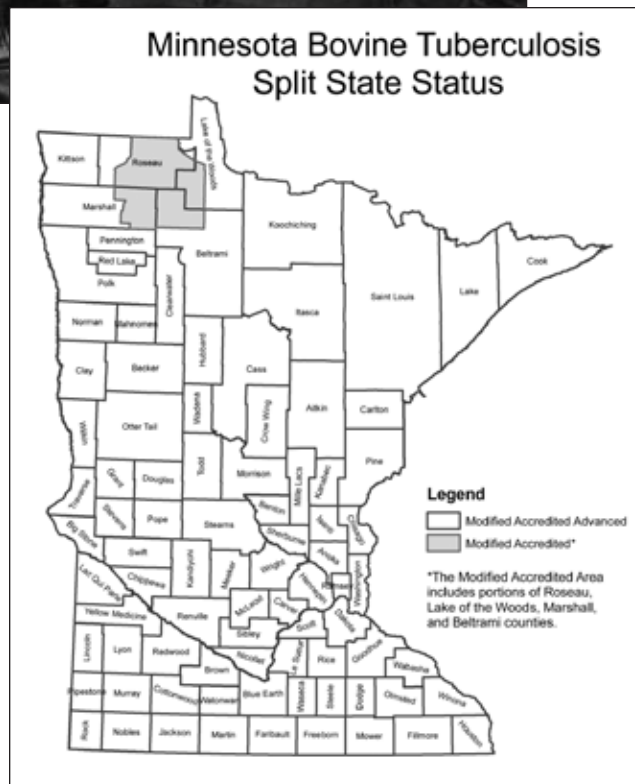
Nordlund is in the MAA zone that requires less testing,



"My advice to producers is to be pretty vigilant of who you deal with on breeding stock," Kelly Nordlund concludes. Pictured are (from left) Mike, Linda, Kelly and Sam Nordlund.



Required testing can increase the number of times cattle have to be processed, says Steve Haugen, pictured here with his wife, Deon. "You do get good at handling cattle."



[PHOTO BY B. LYNN GORDON]

[PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVE AND DEON HAUGEN]

but because he is a seedstock producer with cattle often moving across state lines, he is continuing to test his entire herd annually and paying the cost himself, which averages about \$10 per head.

Despite that cost, Nordlund says, “We were relieved and feel it’ll help us tremendously that we got split-state status. When the whole state was being required to do testing, it definitely affected buyers’ attitudes.”

Some herds were bought out by the government and depopulated; were you offered that option?

Neither Haugen nor Nordlund were in the core TB area where the buyout was offered, but Nordlund says he does know some producers who took the buyout.

“There were a tremendous amount of fencing restrictions for them, had they kept their herds. It was a tough decision for them, but the right decision,” Nordlund says.

He adds that the majority of the cattle in that core area of northwestern Minnesota have been depopulated, and now the focus is on managing the deer in that area.

Have you had any animals in your herd that have been infected with TB?

Both Nordlund and Haugen say they have not.

“The positive about all the testing is that our cattle have been tested so much, we are confident we don’t have a problem,” Nordlund adds. He has tested his herd annually since 2005. Haugen has tested his herd for three years.

What are the pitfalls of having to test your herd for TB?

Since both of these producers have spring- and fall-calving herds, they agree that putting cattle through the chutes for testing has meant a lot of extra work.

They note that there is no good time to put the entire herd through the chutes because either cows are close to calving, or cows have young calves at their side that need to be pulled off so the cows can be worked, all of which adds extra stress to the animals.

Additionally, Nordlund says that any time he wants to take an animal to a show or consignment sale, another test is needed to comply with the 60-day testing rule. That is an added cost.

Haugen also points out that he may test his calves within 60 days of his intended selling date, but if the market changes and he decides to hold them, he then has to retest them and get an additional movement certificate before he can sell.

“You do get good at handling cattle,” Haugen says. He ended up adding a second chute and corrals to his operation just to help in processing the herd more quickly and efficiently.

He does credit the University of Minnesota Beef Team with bringing in several speakers on low-stress animal handling to help producers become better at all the additional cattle

handling. “From those seminars you bring things back to your operation that are beneficial,” Haugen says.

“We’ve been able to sell our cattle. But it does put a burden on us to do extra testing,” Nordlund adds. “It really affected feeder-calf prices before the split-state status went into effect.”

What have you learned from all of this?

“It sure has changed my attitude that

“Other producers need to know it could happen anywhere.”

— *Kelly Nordlund*

this can’t affect me,” Nordlund says. Anyone [who thinks] it can’t exist in their state is in a dreamworld.” He cites the example of the random case that was reported in North Dakota this fall and

says, “I think other producers need to know it could happen anywhere.”

He also says, “In addition to testing our cattle, we are very careful about bringing in
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cattle that could have come from a TB-infected area.”

“My advice to producers is to be pretty vigilant of who you deal with on breeding stock,” Nordlund concludes.

Haugen says it has taught him to keep a better inventory of all the cattle on his ranch. “You do a better job of keeping

track of what cows are in what pastures.” And, he recognizes that the bottom line is that the additional testing and recordkeeping is for cattle producers’ own benefit. “If we want to get TB out of the state, livestock producers need to do the extra testing.”

What’s your outlook for the future?

“We’re pretty hopeful that the state’s efforts will get TB out of Minnesota.” Nordlund says. “It is manageable, but it will likely be a couple years to get back to TB-free status.”

He also credits the Minnesota board of animal health and his local state senator with being proactive in getting the split-state status as quickly as possible.

“Once they got it rolling, they did a good job,” he says.

Haugen says he is anticipating at least another three years — if all goes well — before his region goes back to MAA status, at which time the rest of the state could possibly return to TB-free status. He says in that time he will likely go to managing only a fall-calving herd to minimize the workload.

“We will simplify; testing one herd will be much easier to manage, but there are pros and cons,” he says. “With one herd we won’t be as efficient. We’ll have to double the number of bulls we are using and will need extra feeding equipment, among other things.”

“This has been an inconvenience to do the testing, but our state board of animal health is doing a good job,” he concludes. “People need to realize it could happen anywhere, and if you have cattle, you just have to work through it.”

**Biosecurity critical**

To minimize the transmission of bovine tuberculosis (TB), the following biosecurity steps are recommended:

- ▶ good sanitation;
- ▶ isolation and acclimation of new animals;
- ▶ disease testing and monitoring within the herd;
- ▶ limiting livestock contact with wildlife and neighboring herds;
- ▶ vaccination;
- ▶ recordkeeping; and
- ▶ maintaining a closed herd if possible.

Individual animal identification (ID) is also becoming a more important tool so the health status and location of animals can be tracked and traced back to the herd of origin if necessary.

For producers in states affected by TB, the best rule is to contact a veterinarian before transporting livestock out of state, and contact the state veterinarian of the state of destination to find out exactly which animals need testing and how long before the cattle are shipped they need to be tested for bovine TB.

Source: *Minnesota Board of Animal Health*