

A&M researcher studies disease causing abortions in cattle, bison

By Kathy Crawford
Reporter

Yellowstone National Park has a major problem with buffalo infected with brucellosis, a disease that causes abortions in cattle and bison, an A&M researcher says.

Dr. Donald Davis, associate research scientist with the department of veterinary pathology and the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station (TAES), has been studying brucellosis for three years.

The buffalo in Yellowstone migrate into Montana, Wyoming and Idaho.

Those states are free of the disease and do not want their cattle to be infected with brucellosis, Davis says.

"There's about 3,000 buffalo in Yellowstone," he says. "They've known since the early 1900s that up to half of those buffalo are infected with brucellosis."

But there is no way to keep the bison from migrating out of the park because of problems with building a fence.

"You can't build a fence because of the combination of snow and buffalo," Davis says. "They (buffalo) can wait until the snow blows up on it (the fence) and walk over it or they can walk through it anyway."

"Our fences are made out of 3-inch drill stem and you can't afford to build a fence like that around Yellowstone. They don't want to anyway."

Davis says the disease in bison will not affect the agricultural community of Bryan-College Station much because of the number of buffalo in Texas.

"There's not that many bison in Texas," Davis says. "There's only a couple of large producers. But the meat is becoming more popular and that can affect us. They're selling a lot of it all over the country."

"That's why the USDA is getting interested in it. If they (buffalo) weren't being shipped across state lines, then the USDA wouldn't care. But now they're being moved around like crazy."

The brucellosis research is funded through USDA and APHIS (Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service), which has a contract with TAES.

Davis says \$600,000 has been put into the program since it began three years ago.

In the first experiment, diagnostic techniques were being studied by the researchers.

Researchers found three or four tests that would diagnose the disease if used in conjunction with one an-

other, Davis says.

"You wouldn't want to just bet on one test," Davis says. "In cattle they just use one with maybe two supplemental tests. In buffalo, you want to use three or four tests."

Research also was done to find out if brucellosis could be transmitted from infected buffalo to susceptible cattle.

The studies concluded that the disease was transmitted from buffalo to cattle as easily as from cattle to cattle.

"They are also interested in the pathogenicity of the disease or how it operates in buffalo," Davis says. "We found it does the same as it does in cattle. The mechanisms are the same and it causes abortions."

On the current phase of the research, Davis is working to find a vaccination.

He says there have been some problems with the dosage of the vaccine.

"We've already found with the adult bovine that the adult dosage is too much," Davis says. "It caused 60 percent of them to abort from the vaccine, not the disease."

Distinguishing between an infected buffalo and a vaccinated one also has been a problem.

"We've had buffalo that have been infected as long as 90 or 100 days

and their tests are negative," Davis says. "That means you would diagnose them as not being infected and we know they are."

"What's happening is they're testing buffalo and they come out negative and they may or may not be (negative). They've (buffalo) been getting shipped all over the United States, which is a hazard to the livestock industry and people because they may or may not be really clean."

Davis says it looks as if the vaccination will offer protection from the disease.

However, he says, it is protective at the high level of dosage and researchers are not sure what will happen when the dose is reduced.

"In adults, we'll probably have to drop it (dosage) down and see if we can get rid of these other problems and (have) it remain protective," Davis says. "You may give them enough of the vaccine now to where they don't abort, but they may not be protected against getting the disease."

Davis says the USDA probably will issue some changes in shipping regulations when the research is concluded.

"We're doing it for them," Davis says. "I'm sure when they get our results in, they'll look at the regulations and change them."

Dispute causes Navarro College to lose president

CORSICANA (AP) — The president of Navarro College is resigning partly because of a controversy surrounding courses for nursing home residents, says the chairman of Navarro's board of trustees.

"That's just one aspect (of his decision)," said Chairman Leighton Dawson. "I would not say that was a determining factor."

Kenneth Walker, 52, will become president of Oklahoma City Community College on June 13. He will be the sixth president of the Oklahoma City school since it opened in 1971.

Navarro College and Walker have been under scrutiny since questions arose in August about courses for nursing home residents.

The state auditor's office began an investigation after relatives said nursing home residents were being recruited for courses to bolster enrollment figures and make the college eligible for more state funds.

An attorney told college trustees that Navarro could be asked to repay up to \$1.3 million if state officials determine the courses

did not comply with state requirements.

A committee established by the board of trustees comprised of Walker and trustees Oliver Albritton and Charles Reynolds, submitted a preliminary report to the auditor, but have not made public the contents of the response.

Officials of the state auditor's office and college officials have not said when a final report would be released.

Albritton said he is bitter about the circumstances under which Walker is leaving. But Albritton said Walker will serve the Oklahoma institution well.

"I rejoice for Ken because he's done a good job and he does deserve the criticism," Albritton said.

John Williams, the chairman of the board of regents of the Oklahoma City school, says Walker will bring a proven record of accomplishment as a college president to the institution.

Walker came to Navarro College in 1974, and enrollment almost doubled from 970 in 1974 to nearly 2,000 this year.

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