



TEXAS ANIMAL HEALTH COMMISSION

House Agriculture & Livestock Committee

March 4, 2021



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Texas Animal Health Commission Overview

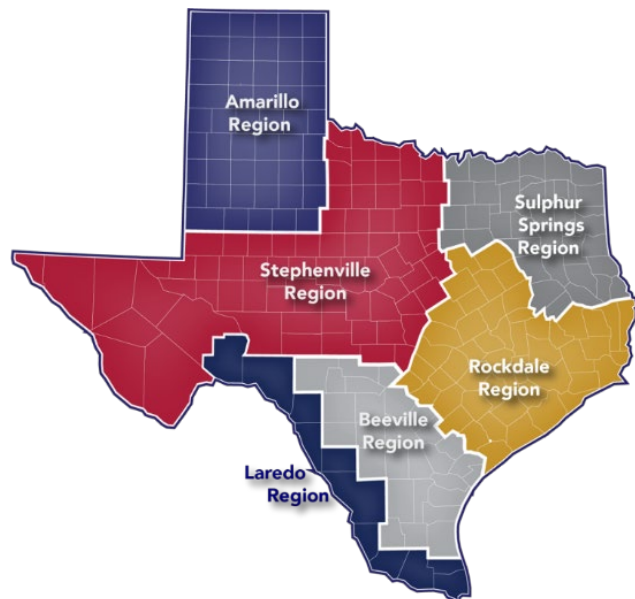
The Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) was established by the Texas Legislature in 1893 as the Texas Livestock Sanitary Commission, making it one of the state's oldest agencies. The original mission was to combat fever ticks that devastated the Texas cattle industry. Today, the agency's mission has expanded to protect the health and productivity of Texas' approximate \$18 billion¹ animal agriculture industry.

The agency's mission is to protect and mitigate Texas' animal agriculture industry from the effects of domestic, foreign, and emerging diseases; promote animal health and productivity; protect human health from animal diseases and conditions transmissible to people; and prepare for and respond to emergencies involving animals. The TAHC accomplishes this mission through the prevention, surveillance, diagnosis, control, and eradication of diseases and parasites affecting domestic and exotic livestock and fowl throughout Texas.

The agency is governed by 13 commissioners appointed by the Governor to serve six-year staggered terms. The commissioners represent the following categories: veterinary medicine, dairies, cattle, swine, sheep and goats, poultry, feedlots, livestock markets, equine, exotic livestock and fowl, and three members from the general public.

The Executive Director of the TAHC, also the State Veterinarian, manages and oversees the agency's daily operations. The agency is comprised of veterinarians, epidemiologists, livestock inspectors, emergency management, legal, compliance, administrative, executive, and support personnel. The agency also works cooperatively with local, state, federal, and international agencies to protect animal health and coordinate multi-jurisdictional responses.

The agency is headquartered in Austin with six regional offices strategically located in Amarillo, Beeville, Laredo, Rockdale, Stephenville, and Sulphur Springs. TAHC employees work with livestock and poultry producers, livestock markets, ranchers, veterinarians, and local jurisdictions to promote the health and productivity of Texas livestock and poultry.



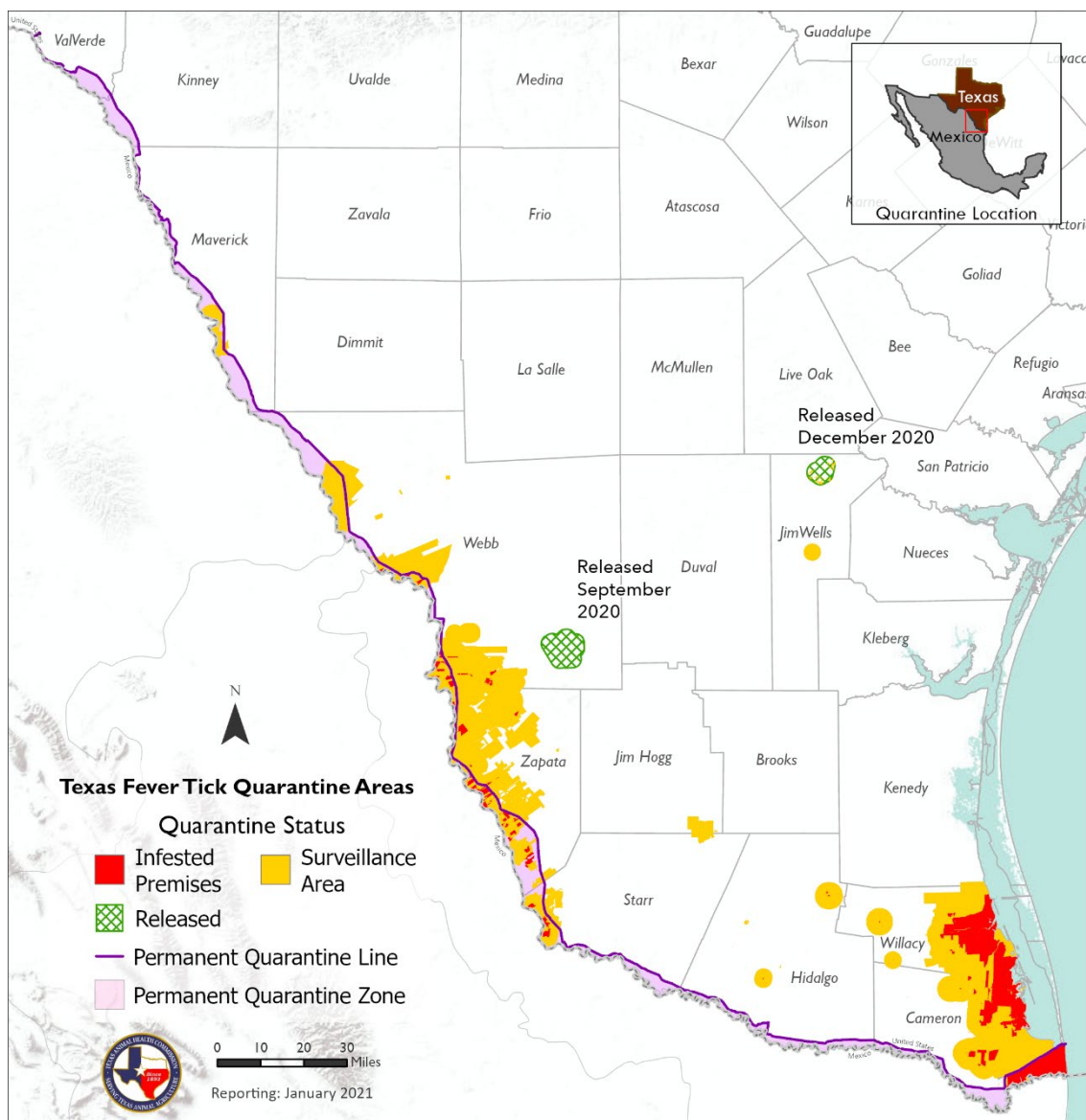
¹ *National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS)*, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE (USDA), 2017 Census of Agriculture Texas State Profile, accessed January 29, 2021.



Cattle Fever Tick Quarantine Areas

Cattle fever ticks are a significant threat to the United States cattle industry. The ticks are capable of carrying the protozoa, or microscopic parasites, *Babesia bovis* or *B. bigemina*, commonly known as cattle fever. Cattle fever attacks and destroys the animals' red blood cells, causing acute anemia, high fever, and enlargement of the spleen and liver, ultimately resulting in death for up to 90% of susceptible naïve cattle.

As of January 31, 2021, Texas has 188 infested quarantine premises, 70 exposed quarantine premises, and 2,717 adjacent/check quarantine premises. More than 948,000 acres are currently quarantined for cattle fever tick.





Emergency Management

TAHC Response to COVID-19 in Animals

The TAHC dedicated subject matter experts to the development and implementation of the state's COVID-19 protocol for animals. Using this protocol, the TAHC has conducted 58 animal assessments, which led to 8 positive COVID-19 cases in non-livestock animals.² The TAHC coordinated with the Texas Department of State Health Services, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and Texas A&M Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory to provide guidance to veterinarians and animal owners regarding COVID-19 and testing for companion animals. The TAHC also continues to provide animal data to the USDA, CDC, and the Texas Department of Emergency Management.

February 2021 Winter Weather Event

The TAHC staffed the SOC to coordinate animal issues and STAR requests during the recent winter storm. Field staff coordinated with local jurisdictions to address animal needs, and the TAHC coordinated governmental and non-governmental response partner calls to identify animal issues. The TAHC continues to coordinate with the U.S. Department of Agriculture – Farm Service Agency (FSA) and other state and federal partners to receive and provide updates regarding animal agriculture in Texas. Constituents may report agricultural losses to their local FSA office; please note any time-sensitive deadlines.



² Texas has had 51 animals (2 tigers, 1 cougar, 1 lion, 26 cats, and 21 dogs) test positive for COVID-19. 43 of those animals were part of a targeted surveillance research project independent of the TAHC's 58 assessments.



Sunset Advisory Commission Updates

A key finding of the Sunset Staff Report was the recommended closure of the TAHC Austin State-Federal Laboratory to realize cost efficiencies. In fiscal year 2019, regulatory test samples decreased from approximately 850,000 to 70,000 due to the loss of federal funding related to cattle brucellosis surveillance testing. The TAHC contemporaneously assessed the current laboratory services and costs, and on September 22, 2020, TAHC commissioners approved and the Executive Director requested the Texas Facilities Commission terminate the current laboratory lease.

