

Requirements for Spayed Heifers from Mexico

1. Purpose and Background

This document defines the requirements for importing spayed heifer cattle from Mexico and provides guidance for Veterinary Services (VS) personnel overseeing and monitoring the importation of spayed heifers.

Import requirements for Mexican spayed heifers were developed in 2005 to prevent the introduction of brucellosis-infected female feeder cattle. As a result, VS requires all Mexican female feeder cattle presented for importation be spayed and determined not pregnant at the time of spaying. Such cattle are referred to hereinafter as “spayed heifers.” The requirements are contained in title 9, *Code of Federal Regulations* (9 CFR) 93.400 *et. seq.* and in a protocol negotiated directly with Mexico (Protocolo de Castracion de Vaquillas Para La Exportacion, hereinafter “the protocol”).

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and Secretaria de Agricultura, y Desarrollo Rural (Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development – SADER), Servicio Nacional de Sanidad, Inocuidad y Calidad Agroalimentaria (National Service of Health, Safety and Quality Agrofood – SENASICA) authorities will work together to implement the activities set forth in this guidance document.

This guidance document represents the Agency’s position on this topic. It does not create or confer any rights for or on any person and does not bind the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) or the public. The information it contains may be made available to the public. While this document provides guidance for users outside VS, VS employees may not deviate from the directions provided herein without appropriate justification and supervisory concurrence.

2. Document Status

A. Review date: 07/23/2022.

B. This document replaces VS Memorandum No 591.63, which is cancelled. The content of the document has been updated to reflect requirement changes negotiated with Mexico, and also to reflect changes to VS structure after its 2018 reorganization.

3. Reason for Reissuance

Not applicable.

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4. Authority and References

A. Authorities (*Code of Federal Regulations* (CFR) and U.S. Code (U.S.C.)):

- [7 CFR 371.4](#)
- [9 CFR 93.427](#)

B. Documents:

[VS Bulletin 2018.03: Bovine Tuberculosis Testing Requirements for Cattle Imported to the United States from Mexico](#)

5. Audience

VS employees, other Federal and State agencies, and members of the public.

6. Guidance

A. Eligibility for Spaying in Mexico

- 1) Under the terms of Mexico's import protocol with the United States, heifers presented for spaying in Mexico for export to the United States must have been born and continuously resided in Mexico. In addition, the heifers must be under 18 months of age at the time of surgery, as confirmed by dental examination to be performed by the veterinary surgeon performing the surgery.
- 2) A veterinary surgeon approved by SADER must perform the spaying; see Section C.1).
- 3) Holstein and Holstein-cross spayed heifers are ineligible for export to the United States.

B. APHIS Import Requirements for Spayed Heifers

1) Identification

- a. Spayed heifers must have an official National Individual Livestock Identification (Sistema Nacional de Identificación Individual de Ganado) System (SINIIGA) ear tag.
- b. Spayed heifers must be identified with a distinct, permanent "M" mark (e.g, brand) that is legible and placed on the right side of the tailhead. New branding guidelines for Mexican spayed heifers require the "M" brand to be between 3 inches and 5 inches (7.5 and 12.5 cm) in size, and located on the right side of the animal within 4 inches (10 cm) of the midline of the tailhead (this should be interpreted as the top of the brand being within 4 inches from and above the hook and pin bones). The brand should be within 18 inches (45.7 cm) of the anus.

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Additionally the “M” points may be rounded as opposed to having sharp corners for ease of application. See Attachment 2, *Breeding Cattle branding diagram*.

- c. APHIS also requires a blue metal Mexican export eartag, in accordance with 9 CFR 93.427(d).

2) Documentation

- a. As set forth in the protocol, a spay certificate (see Attachment 1) or photocopy as described in the next subsection must accompany spayed heifers presented for entry to the United States.
- b. The following applies to a group/lot of spayed heifers listed on one spay certificate, but divided into two or more lots for presentation at the VS port of entry on different days: If the original spay certificate is not available for the second or subsequent lots, photocopies of the certificate will be allowed if the copies are countersigned and sealed by a SADER veterinarian.

3) Other Requirements

- a. Spayed heifers must comply with the tuberculosis (TB), fever tick, and other requirements in 9 CFR 93.427 and VS Bulletin 2018.03; "Bovine Tuberculosis Testing Requirements for Cattle Imported to the United States from Mexico."
- b. Under the terms of the protocol, spayed heifers must be presented for entry into the United States no sooner than 21 days and no later than 180 days from the date of surgery (i.e., must be less than 24 months of age when they enter the United States). Cattle that have the middle two incisors erupted and fully developed are considered 24 months of age.
- c. Surgical wounds must be completely healed when the heifers are presented at the port.
- d. The protocol with Mexico requires that pre-export testing in Mexico be performed either before spay surgery, or no sooner than 60 days after spay surgery. For example, an animal could be injected with tuberculin 72 hours before the scheduled spay surgery and the TB test read no later than the day of surgery. Alternatively, a TB test may be conducted at least 60 days past the surgery date to avoid the possibility that the stress of the surgery would interfere with the TB test results.

Note: APHIS will not accept TB tests performed in Mexico within 60 days following the spay surgery date. If two TB tests are conducted, they must be conducted at least 60 days apart.

C. Roles and Responsibilities

1) Mexico

- a. The protocol makes SADER responsible for approving the training of veterinary surgeons and overseeing/auditing the supervising veterinarians in the proper techniques for spaying heifers in Mexico.
 1. **Approved veterinary surgeons** are veterinarians who have received training sanctioned by SADER, are included in the SADER list of veterinarians approved to perform spay surgeries, will spay according to the approved protocol, and are authorized by SADER to issue spay certificates.
 2. **Approved supervising veterinarians** are Committee, State, or Federal veterinarians who have received proper training endorsed by SADER, are included in the SADER list of veterinarians approved to supervise spay surgeries, will supervise all spay surgeries and ensure surgeries are performed properly, and ensure spay heifers are properly branded and tagged. This person will endorse spay certificates.
- b. SADER will provide a designated point of contact to LAIE who will keep an official list of SADER-approved veterinary surgeons authorized to perform spaying, and a list of the approved supervising veterinarians who will observe all surgeries and endorse the spay certificates. SADER will update the list at least annually. SADER will update the list more often if it adds or deletes approved veterinary surgeons. SADER will then resubmit the list to the LAIE point of contact. These lists will be posted on the LAIE SharePoint site and on the SADER/SENASICA web page. For further information on the SADER/SENASICA's web page, please contact the Southern Border Port Director or the LAIE Ruminant Import Staff listed on the last page of this document.

The SADER-approved supervising veterinarian (in most cases a Committee veterinarian; however, State or Federal veterinarians can also perform these duties) authorized to monitor the spaying procedures must be continually present during 100 percent of the surgeries performed.

- c. The approved supervising veterinarian can monitor up to three veterinary surgeons performing spay surgeries simultaneously, at the same location, in a given day.
- d. The approved supervising veterinarian will observe the size and location of brands and placement of ear tags for spayed heifers and record the ear tag numbers on the spay certificate.

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- e. The approved veterinary surgeon may perform a maximum of 300 spay surgeries in a 24-hour period.
 - f. All heifers are required to have a SINIIGA ear tag. When heifers do not have a SINIIGA ear tag at the time of surgery, the approved veterinary surgeon must place a SINIIGA ear tag to each animal (without a tag) immediately after surgery.
 - g. The veterinarians SADER approves to perform and/or supervise spay procedures for exported heifers must certify that all pertinent required documentation has been verified and found acceptable before signing. Under the protocol, the official Original Spay Certificates and other certificates required for exportation to the United States must be kept on file for at least 3 years by both the issuing (approved surgeon) veterinarian and the SADER-approved supervising veterinarian. These documents must be available for review on APHIS' request.
 - h. SADER/SENASICA will audit the supervising process to verify that Mexican States are implementing the spay heifer program properly.
- 2) United States
- a. LAIE will maintain the list of Mexican supervising veterinarians and veterinary surgeons (as received from SADER) on the APHIS VS Strategy and Policy LAIE SharePoint site. The list will include the dates the supervising veterinarians and veterinary surgeons were trained in their duties associated with the Mexican Spayed Heifer Program.
 - b. The Southern Border Port Director will periodically review the border States' activities to assist APHIS port veterinarians with implementation issues and to monitor APHIS personnel for compliance with this document's provisions. In addition, the Southern Border Port Director will serve as a liaison between border State personnel and LAIE, and will report noncompliance issues to the LAIE Ruminant Import staff.
 - c. APHIS port veterinarians will inspect spayed heifers at the port of entry and verify the following:
 - 1. The Mexican veterinarians listed on the spay certificate are authorized to issue or endorse the document.
 - 2. The required types of identification and documentation listed in part B. 1) accompany the animals, and the ear tags correlate with each other and other documentation.
 - 3. Age, TB testing timelines, wound healing, and other import eligibility factors listed in part B. 3) are acceptable.

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4. In cases of questionable spaying or to determine the pregnancy status of individual animals, rectal palpation may be performed at the discretion of APHIS port veterinarians to evaluate the animal's status.
5. Animals not listed on spay certificates or otherwise not meeting all APHIS entry requirements, will be refused entry and returned to Mexico. APHIS port veterinarians will also monitor consignments for compliance as detailed in part D and keep records (notes made in the Veterinary Services Process Streamlining database regarding reasons for rejection, and notifications sent to LAIE when applicable) of monitoring activities.
 - d. Heifers that do not meet the above standards will be permanently branded with "CN" for "Consumo Nacional" by a SADER official or other person designated by port inspection facility management to render the animal ineligible for entry into the United States. The application of the branding must be observed by APHIS personnel before removing the animals from the port.

D. Compliance

- 1) APHIS personnel will inspect ear tags using the guidelines set forth below:
 - a. For lots of up to 30 spayed heifers, inspect every ear tag to verify a match with the accompanying spay certificate. If there are any non-matches, the individual animal (or animals) or the entire lot may be rejected at the discretion of the inspector.
 - b. For lots between 31 to 100 heifers, inspect every third tag to verify a match with the accompanying spay certificate. If there are any non-matches, inspect and verify all remaining tags. Individual non-matching animals or the entire lot may be rejected at the discretion of the inspector.
 - c. For lots of more than 100 heifers, inspect every third tag for the first 100 heifers, and every tenth tag after that, to verify a match with the accompanying spay certificate. If there are any non-matches, inspect and verify all remaining tags. Individual non-matching animals or the entire lot may be rejected at the discretion of the inspector.
- 2) The port veterinarian has the discretion to visually inspect a heifer's dentition. The port veterinarian may further determine compliance by random checks through rectal palpation or other appropriate means to detect pregnancy, the presence of ovaries, or other indications of improper technique in the spaying process.
- 3) APHIS may reject single animals or the entire lot of spayed heifers presented for importation to the United States on the detection of compliance issues through monitoring as stated above.

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- 4) If a Mexico veterinary surgeon (or supervising veterinarian) is determined to be responsible for incidents of noncompliance regarding the spaying of heifers, depending on the severity of the noncompliance the veterinarian could be temporarily or permanently removed from the list of approved veterinarians, and any additional lots spayed or certified by the veterinarian will not be considered eligible for entry to the United States.
- 5) Any reports of improper spaying should be communicated to the Southern Border Port Director, who will contact LAIE Ruminant Import staff via email, with the subject "Improper Spaying of Mexican Heifers", at VS.Live.Animal.Import.Export@aphis.usda.gov.
- 6) APHIS will actively pursue any reports of female feeder cattle aborting or calving in feedlots or pastures, as well as Food Safety and Inspection Service slaughter reports of pregnant animals or animals with ovaries. To notify the LAIE Ruminant Import staff immediately of any such incidents, use the email address and subject header above.
- 7) LAIE staff will periodically analyze all reports of noncompliance. Multiple shipments of animals from Mexico found to be improperly spayed, or misidentified as non-pregnant, may result in a number of possible consequences, including re-evaluation, suspension, or termination of the program.

7. Inquiries

To contact the Southern Border Ports supervisory veterinary medical officer, call the office at (512) 383-2400. For questions regarding this document, contact the LAIE Ruminant Import staff at VS.Live.Animal.Import.Export@aphis.usda.gov or 301-851-3300 Menu Option # 2.

Attachment 1: Spay Certificate

Attachment 2: Feeder (Spayed) Cattle branding diagram



**REPORTE DE CASTRACION DE VAQUILLAS
BOVINE FEMALE CASTRATION REPORT**

FOLIO No.:	
HOJA	DE
PAGE	OF

FECHA DE CASTRACIÓN _____ DE _____ DE _____
DATE OF CASTRATION DD (DAY) MM (MONTH) AAAA (YEAR)

RANCHO EN EL CUAL LAS VAQUILLAS FUERON CASTRAD/
RANCH ON WICH BOVINE FEMALE WERE CASTRATED : _____

DUEÑO DE LOS ANIMALES CASTRADOS :
OWNER OF BATCH OF ANIMALS CASTRATED : _____

DIRECCION DEL RANCHO DONDE LAS VAQUILLAS FUERON CASTRADAS:
ADDRESS OF RANCH WHERE BOVINE FEMALES WERE CASTRATED : _____

MUNICIPIO : _____ ESTADO : _____
MUNICIPALITY : _____ STATE : _____

N° DE ANIMALES CASTRADOS : _____ NO EXPORTARSE ANTES DE: _____ (21 DIAS/DAYS)
N° OF CASTRATED HEADS: _____ NO EXPORTARSE DESPUES _____ (180 DIAS/DAYS)

VETERINARIO CIRUJANO AUTORIZADO AUTORIZED VETERINARY SURGEON	VETERINARIO CIRUJANO SUPERVISOR AUTORIZADO AUTORIZED SUPERVISING VETERINARY SURGEON
NOMBRE NAME: _____	NOMBRE : NAME : _____
CLAVE : CODE: _____ VIGENCIA : VALID TO: _____	CLAVE : CODE: _____ VIGENCIA : VALID TO: _____
FIRMA: SIGNATURE: _____	FIRMA: SIGNATURE: _____

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OFICIAL FEDERAL DE MÉXICO EN SALUD ANIMAL QUE ENDOSA ESTE CERTIFICADO
MEXICAN FEDERAL ANIMAL HEALTH OFFICIAL ENDORSING THE CERTIFICATE

Nombre / Name

Firma / Signature

Anote el numero de arete si el animal ya ha recibido aprobación para ser exportado, si no trace una línea a lo largo en la columna.
Note the earring number if animals have already been approved for export; if not, draw a line through the column.



**REPORTE DE CASTRACION DE VAQUILLAS
BOVINE FEMALE CASTRATION REPORT**

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OFICIAL FEDERAL DE MÉXICO EN SALUD ANIMAL QUE ENDOSA ESTE CERTIFICADO MEXICAN FEDERAL ANIMAL HEALTH OFFICIAL ENDORSING THE CERTIFICATE	
Nombre / Name	
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 Note the earring number if animals have already been approved for export; if not, draw a line through the column.



REPORTE DE CASTRACION DE VAQUILLAS
BOVINE FEMALE CASTRATION REPORT

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OFICIAL FEDERAL DE MÉXICO EN SALUD ANIMAL QUE ENDOSA ESTE CERTIFICADO MEXICAN FEDERAL ANIMAL HEALTH OFFICIAL ENDORSING THE CERTIFICATE	
Nombre / Name	
Firma / Signature	

Anote el numero de arete si el animal ya ha recibido aprobación para ser exportado, si no trace una línea a lo largo en la columna.
 Note the earring number if animals have already been approved for export; if not, draw a line through the column.

Attachment 2: Feeder (Spayed) Cattle Branding Diagrams

