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# U.S.-Mexico Binational Committee

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The U.S.-Mexico Binational Committees (BNCs), specifically the BNC for Tuberculosis and Brucellosis, and the BNC for Cattle Fever Ticks, operate under the auspices of the U.S. Animal Health Association (USAHA). Historically, the majority of BNC activities focused on bovine tuberculosis (TB), starting in 1993 with a mandate to promote a comprehensive U.S.-Mexico TB eradication effort and facilitate cattle trade across the common border. Today, the BNCs provide a forum for U.S. and Mexican Federal, State, and industry stakeholders to interact and actively address issues hampering control and eradication of bovine TB, brucellosis, and cattle fever ticks. The BNCs promote collaboration, coordination, and resolution of cattle health and trade issues at all levels.

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Organization and Membership

The first BNC, the Binational Committee for Tuberculosis, was formed in 1993 with the U.S and Mexican Chief Veterinary Officers as co-chairs and seven members from each country representing the livestock industries (beef, dairy, and a general farm representative), regulatory animal health officials, and the research community. Brucellosis activities were added during the 1995 USAHA annual meeting, creating the Binational Committee for Tuberculosis and Brucellosis, with 2 additional seats for brucellosis specialists. Binational interests later expanded to a separate but related Binational Committee for Cattle Fever Ticks, with 16 members.

Leadership of the BNC transitioned over the years to U.S. and Mexican co-chairs selected from the general membership. Governmental representation on the U.S.

side includes USDA APHIS Veterinary Services, International Services, and Wildlife Services; USDA Agricultural Research Service; and State Animal Health Officials representing the U.S. border States of Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and California. Governmental representation on the Mexican side includes members from the National Health Services, Food Safety and Food Quality (SENASICA); the National Institute of Forestry, Agricultural, and Livestock Research (INIFAP); and State Animal Health Officials.

### History and TB Activities

The U.S.-Mexico Binational Committee for Tuberculosis was established in 1993 in response to a request from the USAHA Committee on Tuberculosis for a comprehensive U.S.-Mexico TB eradication and control program, including a joint committee. At the time, Mexico did not have a strong national TB eradication program and APHIS regulations governing importation of cattle from Mexico were inadequate to address the associated risk. The BNC was tasked to evaluate TB control and eradication efforts in the United States and Mexico and draft criteria for export of cattle to the United States, while APHIS and SENASICA developed national-level regulations and import standards.

## **1994-2001**

APHIS initially proposed amendments to the import requirements for cattle from Mexico in May 1994. The proposal was unpopular with BNC members representing the U.S. Border States (California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas), who developed the Consensus Document in response. This document recognized three stages of TB eradication in Mexico—Control/Preparatory, Eradication, and Free—with associated import testing. APHIS withdrew the proposal in February 1995 and the U.S. Border States adopted the Consensus Document into State regulations.

Under the auspices of the BNC, U.S. members and associates began conducting onsite reviews of various Mexican States to determine TB status in accordance with the criteria in the Consensus Document. The review teams generated a report with a status recommendation, which the BNC members voted on. The U.S. Border States allowed importation of cattle tested in accordance with the designated TB status.

The Consensus Document formed the basis for legislation establishing the National Campaign against Bovine Tuberculosis in Mexico in 1996, which remains in force today. APHIS efforts to develop comprehensive import regulations acceptable to Federal, State, and industry partners continued.

## **2001-2007**

APHIS published an interim rule in April 2001 intended to promote a more uniform approach to cattle imports while efforts to develop more permanent regulations acceptable to State and industry partners continued. This rule classified all of Mexico as relatively high risk for bovine TB and required negative herd and individual tests for all imported cattle. When BNC members pointed out that some parts of Mexico were lower TB risk, APHIS developed a waiver system to exempt qualifying regions from herd testing. The Waiver Conditions Document was based on the principles of animal health regionalization in title 9, Code of Federal Regulations, part 92.2 (9 CFR 92.2) and the 1999 Bovine TB Uniform Methods and Rules.

APHIS began leading reviews of Mexican regions using the Waiver Conditions Document, with BNC support. The BNC continued to vote on TB status, which APHIS administratively recognized via a VS Notice title Bovine Tuberculosis Testing Requirements for the Importation of Mexican Cattle (later becoming a VS Bulletin). The first VS Notice was published in 2002 and recognized the TB status of 18 Mexican regions.

APHIS published a second interim rule in June 2003 that implemented a permit system for cattle from Mexico and classified most of Mexico as non-accredited, effectively prohibiting cattle exports from Mexican States without APHIS-recognized TB status except direct to slaughter. By 2004, APHIS was nearing publication of a proposed rule to apply U.S. domestic TB status levels and movement requirements to certain regions of Mexico. However, issuance of the 2005 Bovine TB Uniform Methods and Rules in January 2005 delayed publication of the proposed rule. Internal APHIS discussions in 2006 resulted in redrafting of the proposal to create stand-alone import TB regulations and a separate Mexico TB notice. Meanwhile, APHIS-led reviews with administrative recognition of waiver status continued.

## **2007-2014**

On recommendation from USAHA, APHIS officially eliminated the waiver system in June 2005 and began requiring Mexican regions to meet the same criteria as U.S. States qualifying for equivalent status. APHIS created a VS Memorandum titled Guidelines for Tuberculosis Reviews in Mexico to standardize this process, based on the 2005 Bovine TB Uniform Methods and Rules and designed to guide onsite reviews and TB status decisions until new regulations were in place. However, APHIS placed the proposed import TB rule and Mexico notice on hold indefinitely in October 2008 due to planned changes to the U.S. domestic TB program. After extensive stakeholder consultation, drafting of a combined domestic and import rule governing both TB and brucellosis commenced in 2012.

APHIS continued to lead onsite reviews of Mexican regions and report the results at BNC meetings but final decisions on TB status transitioned to APHIS. By 2014, APHIS recognized the TB status of over 25 States and zones in Mexico for cattle import purposes and the burden of monitoring these regions had become untenable. APHIS and SENASICA agreed in December 2014 to consolidate the various States and zones into 12 (later 16) distinct regions. APHIS developed [new standards](#) for evaluating these regions in accordance with the provisions of the draft proposed rule, carrying over many of the provisions in VS Memorandum 552.41.

## 2015-Present

APHIS began conducting onsite reviews of the 16 proposed regions in March 2015 using the new standards. The comprehensive [TB and brucellosis proposed rule](#) was published in December 2015. Due to complex and somewhat adverse public comment, APHIS [withdrew the domestic parts](#) in March 2019 for further development. APHIS published the [final import rule](#) in September 2020. This effectively established a system for APHIS to evaluate and classify the TB and brucellosis status of foreign regions and apply risk-based import testing requirements. APHIS maintains an [online list of regions](#) classified in accordance with the new regulations. BNC members receive updates from APHIS staff on onsite reviews and continue to provide input on factors impacting cattle exports on both sides of the border.

### Other Activities

The BNCs are actively engaged in a variety of other bilateral interests, from onsite reviews to assess the status of Mexican regions for brucellosis (Sonora) and cattle

fever ticks (Baja California, Chihuahua) to developing a tick buffer zone along the common border. The BNC facilitates several ongoing research projects, including genotyping of U.S. and Mexican TB strains, creating and maintaining a TB serum bank, and exploring the role of unpasteurized Mexican milk and cheese in TB cases in southern California. The BNCs remain actively involved in cattle trade issues, providing incentive and input for resolution.

#### BNC Meetings

The BNCs meet twice per year during annual meetings of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) in the United States and the Confederacion Nacional de Organizaciones Ganaderas (CNOG) in Mexico. BNC meetings are open to all interested stakeholders. The agendas include program updates from Federal and State Animal Health Officials, APHIS onsite animal health status reviews of Mexican regions, laws and regulations, animal identification, import and export issues, and other areas of concern to the livestock industries of the United States and Mexico.

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