

SUBJECT: Allowing inspectors discretion to examine livestock at markets

COMMITTEE: Agriculture and Livestock — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 7 ayes — Hardcastle, Anderson, B. Brown, Burnam, Farrar, Herrero, Olivo
0 nays

WITNESSES: For —Dan Dierschke, Texas Farm Bureau; Ed Small, Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers
Against — None
On —Bob Hillman, Texas Animal Health Commission

BACKGROUND: Under Agriculture Code, sec. 161.114, Texas Animal Health Commission inspectors must be present to visually examine all livestock for sale at livestock markets.

DIGEST: HB 1362 would allow, rather than require, Texas Animal Health Commission inspectors to examine livestock at a livestock market. Inspectors no longer would have to visually examine all livestock at a market.

The bill would take immediate effect if finally passed by a two-thirds record vote of the membership of each house. Otherwise, it would take effect September 1, 2005.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 1362 would permit the Texas Animal Health Commission to assign livestock inspectors to disease outbreak emergencies rather than livestock markets to inspect routine sales. Livestock inspectors are expected to perform an inordinate amount of inspections in comparison to the number of available inspectors. Inspectors are required to respond when disease outbreaks arise, but current law does not permit inspector absences from livestock markets. Given the small number of inspectors in the state, the Texas Animal Health Commission needs the flexibility to reassign inspectors to handle emergencies.

The Texas Animal Health Commission expects that it would exercise this authority only in emergencies, and it primarily would reassign livestock market inspectors of species not intended for human consumption. For example, livestock markets include horse sales to which agency inspectors are assigned for checking equine infectious anemia, a fatal horse disease. Since horses do not enter the human food supply in Texas, these inspectors could be reassigned to emergencies before an inspector of a species intended for human consumption.

Texas has a multi-step inspection process through which an animal is examined for diseases at different stages. If an inspector is absent from a livestock market, diseases still may be detected and dealt with appropriately at the next stage in the process. Additionally, when an inspector is pulled from a livestock market for an emergency, there are other individuals at the livestock market who inspect animals for diseases in an unofficial capacity.

Although ideally an inspection should occur at every step in the process, this expectation is unrealistic in view of the livestock-to-inspector ratio in Texas, and no amount of inspections can guarantee disease containment. Concerns over reducing inspectors at livestock markets are outweighed by the state's need to respond to disease outbreak emergencies.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

HB 1362 could reduce the effectiveness of animal inspections at livestock markets. Even though Texas employs a multi-step process, fewer inspections at markets could contribute to livestock disease contamination, possibly increasing disease risk in species that enter the human food supply.

HB 1362 does not specify that inspectors still would have to remain present at livestock markets except in emergencies, nor does it specify that inspectors who inspect species outside the human food supply should be assigned first to emergencies. The livestock inspection process could be neglected dangerously if inspectors were withdrawn from livestock markets for non-emergency purposes or if the inspectors of animals for human consumption inappropriately were reassigned during emergencies.

NOTES:

The companion bill, SB 591 by Jackson, was reported favorably, without amendment, by the Senate Natural Resources Subcommittee on Agriculture and Coastal Resources on March 21 and recommended for the Local and Uncontested Calendar.

