

VS Guidance 13416.2

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.

VS developed import requirements for Mexican spayed heifers in 2005 to prevent the introduction of brucellosis-infected female feeder cattle into the United States. As a result, VS requires all Mexican-origin female feeder cattle not originating from a region classified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) as Level I for brucellosis that are presented for importation be either spayed and determined not pregnant at the time of spaying or tested for brucellosis in accordance with [title 9, Code of Federal Regulations \(9 CFR\) 93.442](#). Cattle spayed per this guidance are referred to hereinafter as “spayed heifers.” The requirements for spaying are contained in [9 CFR 93.400 et. seq.](#) and a protocol negotiated directly with Mexico ([U.S. Protocol for the import of Steers and Spayed Heifers, Cattle, and Bison \(Feeders\) from Mexico](#), hereinafter “the protocol”).

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.

This guidance document represents the Agency’s position on this topic and is intended solely as guidance. It does not have the force and effect of law, 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. Language suggesting that this guidance is mandatory (e.g., “shall,” “must,” “required,” or “requirement”) should not be construed as binding unless the terms quote from a statutory or regulatory requirement. The information this document contains may be made available to the public. While this document provides guidance for users outside APHIS, APHIS employees may not deviate from the directions provided herein without appropriate justification and supervisory concurrence.

2. Document Status

Review date: 11/15/2026.

3. Reason for Reissuance

This document replaces VSG 13416.1, which is canceled. The content of the document has been updated to reflect requirement changes negotiated with Mexico.

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4. Authority and References

A. Authorities (*Code of Federal Regulations* (CFR)):

[7 CFR 371.4](#)

[9 CFR 93.442](#)

[9 CFR 93.427](#)

B. References:

[VS Bulletin 2022.1 Bovine TB Testing Requirements for Mexico](#)

[VS Guidance 13414, Branding Requirements for Imported Mexican Bovines \(Cattle/Bison\)](#)

[U.S. Protocol for the Import of Steers and Spayed Heifers, Cattle, and Bison \(Feeders\) 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) The requirements outlined in this document pertain to spayed heifers imported for feeding purposes that do not otherwise meet APHIS requirements for brucellosis as described in [9 CFR 93.442](#). Intact heifers for feeding may be imported from the Mexican States classified as Level I status for brucellosis without testing for brucellosis or spaying; therefore, this guidance does not apply to those animals. Instead, they would need to meet the import requirements outlined in the [Import Protocol for Sexually Intact Cattle from Mexico to the United States](#).
- 2) 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.
- 3) A veterinary surgeon authorized by SADER/SENASICA must perform the spaying (see Section 6.C.1)
- 4) The heifers must be under 18 months of age at the time of surgery, the veterinary surgeon must confirm age via dental examination.
- 5) Holstein and Holstein-cross spayed heifers are ineligible for export to the United States.

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B. APHIS Import Requirements for Spayed Heifers

1) Identification

- a. Spayed heifers must be identified with an official National Individual Livestock Identification (Sistema Nacional de Identificación Individual de Ganado) System (SINIIGA) ear tag (yellow tag) and a blue metal Mexican export ear tag, per [9 CFR 93.427\(e\)](#).
- b. Spayed heifers must be identified with a distinct, permanent, and legible “M” mark (applied with a freeze brand, hot iron, or other method approved by APHIS) placed on the right side of the tailhead. Refer to [VS Guidance 13414, Branding Requirements for Imported Mexican Bovines \(Cattle/Bison\)](#) for additional information.

2) Documentation

- a. As the protocol outlines, a spay certificate or photocopy, as described in the next subsection, must accompany spayed heifers presented for entry to the United States.
- b. Regarding 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/SENASICA veterinarian.

3) Other requirements

- a. Spayed heifers must comply with all applicable requirements for tuberculosis (TB) and fever ticks in [9 CFR part 93](#), as well as the general requirements for cattle from Mexico in 9 CFR 93.427, [VSB 2022.1 Bovine TB Testing Requirements for Mexico](#) and the protocol [U.S. Protocol for the Import of Steers and Spayed Heifers, Cattle, and Bison \(Feeders\) 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 and must be less than 24 months of age when they enter the United States. Cattle with the middle two incisors erupted and fully developed are considered at least 24 months of age.
- c. Surgical wounds must be completely healed when the heifers are presented at the U.S. port of entry.
- 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

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surgery to avoid the possibility that the stress of the surgery would interfere with the TB test results. 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.

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/SENASICA 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 authorized veterinarians who have received training provided by SADER/SENASICA, are included in the SADER/SENASICA list of veterinarians approved to perform spay surgeries, will spay according to the approved protocol, and are authorized by SADER/SENASICA to issue spay certificates.
 2. **Approved supervising veterinarians** are [Mexican] Committee, State, or Federal veterinarians who have received proper training provided by SADER/SENASICA, are included in the SADER/SENASICA 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/SENASICA will maintain an official list of SADER/SENASICA-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/SENASICA will update the list to add or remove veterinarians, and will include the date training was completed and the date approval expires for each veterinarian listed. SADER/SENASICA will provide the current list to APHIS as changes are made, but at least quarterly and/or upon request.
- c. The SADER/SENASICA-approved supervising veterinarian authorized to monitor the spaying procedures must be continually present during all of the surgeries performed.

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- d. The approved supervising veterinarian can monitor up to three (3) veterinary surgeons performing spay surgeries simultaneously at the same location daily.
- e. The approved supervising veterinarian will observe the size and location of brands and placement of ear tags for spayed heifers and record all ear tag numbers on the spay certificate.
- f. The approved veterinary surgeon may perform a maximum of three hundred (300) spay surgeries in twenty-four (24) hours.
- g. All heifers are required to have both the official SINIIGA ear tag and an export blue metal tag. All heifers must have a SINIIGA ear tag at the time of surgery.
- h. The approved veterinary surgeons and supervisors must certify that all pertinent required documentation has been verified and found acceptable before signing the spay certificate. 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 three (3) years by the issuing (approved surgeon) veterinarian and the signing SADER/SENASICA-approved supervising veterinarian. These documents must be available for review at APHIS' request.
- i. SADER/SENASICA and APHIS will audit the supervising process to verify that the Mexican States are implementing the spayed heifer program properly.

2) United States

- a. LAI will maintain the list of approved Mexican supervising veterinarians and veterinary surgeons (as received from SADER/SENASICA) on the VS Strategy and Policy LAI SharePoint site and give a copy to the Southern Border Ports (SBP) Veterinarian in Charge (VIC).
- b. The SBP VIC will assist VS port veterinarians with implementation issues and monitor APHIS personnel for compliance with this guidance's provisions. In addition, the SBP VIC will serve as a liaison between border State personnel and LAI and report noncompliance issues to the LAI staff.
- c. The APHIS port Veterinary Medical Officer (VMO) or designee will inspect spayed heifers at the port of entry and verify the following:
 - 1. The Mexican veterinary surgeons and supervising 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 6.B.1 accompany the animals, and the ear tags must correlate with each other and other documentation.

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3. Age, TB testing timelines, wound healing, and other import eligibility factors (listed in part 6.B.3) are acceptable.
4. In cases of questionable spaying or to determine the pregnancy status of individual animals, the port VMO may perform rectal palpation to evaluate the animal's status.
5. Animals not listed on spay certificates or not meeting all APHIS entry requirements will be refused entry and returned to Mexico. The port VMO will record the identification numbers of each animal refused entry on the VS Form 17-30R, Report of Animals, Birds, Poultry, Eggs, Animal Embryos or Animal Semen Refused Entry. The port VMO will also monitor consignments for compliance as detailed in part 6.D below and keep records (notes made in the Veterinary Services Process Streamlining (VSPS) database regarding reasons for rejection and notifications sent to LAI 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/SENASICA official or a designated representative to render the animal ineligible for entry into the United States. VS personnel must observe the branding before removing the animals from the port. SADER/SENASICA officials or their designated representatives are responsible for coordinating branding with APHIS personnel to ensure APHIS oversight and/or verification.

D. Compliance

- 1) APHIS personnel will inspect ear tags using the guidelines set forth below, at a minimum:
 - a. For lots of up to fifty (50) spayed heifers, inspect every ear tag (both SINIIGA and blue tags) to verify a match with the accompanying spay certificate. If there are any non-matches, the inspector may reject individual non-matching animals or the entire lot.
 - b. For lots greater than fifty (50) head, inspect the first fifty (50) tags and then every third tag after that to verify a match with the accompanying spay certificate. If there are any non-matches, inspect and verify all remaining tags. The inspector may reject individual non-matching animals or the entire lot.
 - c. For lots where all animals are identified with radio frequency identification (RFID) tags, inspect all tags to verify a match with the accompanying spay certificate if the port of entry has RFID tag reading capabilities. The inspector may reject individual non-matching animals or the entire lot.

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- 2) The port VMO has the discretion to visually inspect a heifer's dentition. The port VMO 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) VS may reject single animals or the entire lot of spayed heifers presented for importation to the United States when staff detect compliance issues. VS will notify SADER/SENASICA of any infractions in this regard.
- 4) If VS staff determine that an approved Mexican veterinary surgeon and/or supervising veterinarian is responsible for incidents of noncompliance regarding the spaying of heifers, the surgeon or veterinarian will be ineligible to conduct such activities for at least six (6) months and/or may lose approval permanently. SADER/SENASICA will immediately remove this person from the list of approved veterinarians, and any additional lots spayed or certified by the surgeon or veterinarian will not be considered eligible for entry to the United States.
- 5) Any reports of improper spaying should be communicated to SADER/SENASICA and the SBP VIC, who will contact LAI staff via email, with the subject "Improper Spaying of Mexican Heifers," at LAIE@usda.gov.
- 6) VS will actively pursue any reports of spayed female feeder cattle aborting or calving in feedlots or pastures, as well as Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) slaughter reports of spayed heifers that are pregnant or with ovaries detected at slaughter. LAI staff should be immediately notified of any such incidents via email at LAIE@usda.gov.
- 7) LAI staff will periodically analyze all reports of noncompliance. Multiple shipments of animals from Mexico found to be improperly spayed or misidentified as not pregnant may result in several possible consequences, including re-evaluation, suspension, or termination of the program.

7. Inquiries

Please send all inquiries to:

Live Animal Imports Staff
Strategy and Policy
USDA APHIS Veterinary Services
LAIE@usda.gov.

Southern Border Ports Veterinarian in Charge
USDA APHIS Veterinary Services
VS.SBP@usda.gov

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