

Bont Ticks With Disease Causing Death in Livestock Discovered on St. Croix

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Cattle in St. Martin affected by Bont Tick.

The V.I. Dept. of Agriculture announced Tuesday that a cluster of tropical bont ticks were found in Estate Lower Love on St. Croix on a herd of sheep and horses. These ticks were discovered during a farm visit by the Division of Veterinary Services. The ticks were collected and positively identified by the National Veterinary Services Laboratory, D.O.A. said.

The tropical bont tick, also called *Amblyomma variegatum*, feeds on horses, cattle, sheep and goats and has the potential to transmit fatal disease to these animals. The male tick is large and brightly colored while the female is gray and can be the size of an olive. The bont tick does not affect people and generally does not affect domestic pets such as cats and dogs.

V.I. D.O.A. Commissioner Positive Nelson stated that the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture was immediately contacted following the identification of the tick because it is considered a foreign animal disease vector with serious risk to livestock and horses.

Following USDA protocols, V.I. D.O.A. Veterinary Services placed the infected farm under quarantine and has begun inspecting, registering, and treating all livestock and horses in the immediate area, according to the release. All animals on the quarantined farms will be inspected and treated every two weeks for four years as required. Animal movement in the area will be strictly regulated by the department and stray horses and livestock will be immediately impounded. All animals presented at the abattoir must be tagged prior to arrival.

Mr. Nelson asked for the cooperation of all livestock farmers and horse owners on St. Croix in this eradication effort. Livestock farmers and horse owners must comply with restricted movement regulations and grass cutting restrictions and must present animals for inspection when scheduled. All cattle, sheep, goats and horses will be tagged and microchipped as required by law, the department said.

All farmers and horse owners and the general community are asked to be on the lookout for unusual and suspicious ticks on their animals and to immediately report them to the D.O.A. Veterinary Services Division at 340-642-7320.