

American Veterinary Medical History Society

"Devoted to the Diffusion of Veterinary History"

Vintage Veterinary Instrument #6

Bovine Tuberculin Test Gauge



This is an aluminum tuberculin test gauge. It was used to measure the skin reaction (swelling) to a tuberculin antigen injection in a cow, usually using the caudal fold of the cow's tail. This test was read 72 hours after injection to confirm whether an animal tested positive for bovine tuberculosis.

After Congress initially appropriated \$75,000 in 1916, the US Bureau of Animal Industry organized a national program for the eradication of TB. With \$1.5 million more from Congress in 1918, it involved testing every cow in every herd on every farm in all the United States. Numerous veterinarians were hired and trained by the BAI through state agencies to test herds of cattle in the 1920s and 1930s. At the peak of this program in 1935, veterinarians had administered tuberculin to 25 million cattle. "Reactor" cows were culled to protect the nation's milk supply by reducing the incidence of passing tubercle bacilli to humans, especially children. By 1940, California became accredited as the last state to be declared TB-free.



“Making the intradermic test.” Figure from: *Bovine Tuberculosis: Its History, Control and Eradication*. Albany, NY: New York State Dept. of Agriculture and Markets, Sept. 1928. (Agricultural Bulletin, No. 218); p. 44. <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015077071945>



(Left) “Making the intradermal injection of tuberculin.”

Figure from *Bovine Tuberculosis: Its History...* (1928) p. 46. (Right) Showing a positive reaction in the caudal fold. Photo courtesy Dr. Fred Born

Instrument and description provided by Fred J. Born, DVM (Fond du Lac, Wisconsin), July 15, 2019.