

2007 Cattle Industry Annual Convention & Trade Show

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FMD Preparedness

Issues Forum addresses the industry's preparedness to handle an FMD outbreak in the United States.

by **Mathew Elliott & Shauna Rose Hermel**

NASHVILLE, TENN. (Feb. 1, 2007) — William Henning of Penn State University opened the Issues Forum on foot-and-mouth (FMD) disease by describing what could happen if FMD were to be found in the United States.

The economic reality of an FMD outbreak was devastating to producers in England, Henning said. "We think there are some things we can do in our planning and our strategy here to make that less economically devastating for our producers."

Henning said there are two challenges producers must prepare for in the United States — the actual disease and consumer perception of food safety in the event of an FMD outbreak.

"We believe that proper planning can minimize the risk to livestock producers, beef producers especially, and at the same time be able to communicate well to our consumers that this is not a food safety issue. It is not a human health risk."

Consumer perception may be the most daunting challenge. More than 70% of consumers studied in a recent poll by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) said they believed FMD could affect humans through contact, Henning said. The same poll revealed more than two-thirds of consumers believe humans could be affected by eating meat.

Henning shared results of a fall 2006 FMD summit NCBA conducted in

"I actually see animal agriculture as rural America's World Trade Center. It really requires us to understand the gravity of harm that could occur."

— **Bob Ehart**

Washington, D.C. The summit focused on four tenets of preparedness — prevention, detection, response and recovery. Four working groups were created to focus on outbreak communication, stopping disease progression, disease detection and the role of science in prevention.

A copy of the executive summary of the summit is available online at www.fmdinfo.org/Docs/pdfofbookforweb.pdf.

Paul Ugstad, area veterinarian with USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), said 1929 marked the last confirmed case of FMD in the U.S. The effect was devastating, and entire herds had to be depopulated to prevent a wider spread. More recently, Europe and South America have had similar experiences.

Ugstad encouraged attendees to think of control options besides mass depopulation, noting the World Animal Health

Organization now classifies countries as free of FMD with vaccination or free of FMD without vaccination. In 2001 Uruguay and the United Kingdom both faced FMD outbreaks. Uruguay chose to use vaccine; the UK did not, adding to a much more costly experience with the disease.

Ugstad discussed how APHIS would react to a contagious disease outbreak, such as FMD. Its plan involves getting local, state and the federal governments to work together with quarantines, forming an incident command system (ICS). He urged industry input to assist in policy development for business continuity.

Bob Ehart, animal and health safeguarding coordinator for the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA), said the incidence of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) and FMD in the UK, along with the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center prompted interest in whether the U.S. was prepared for a foreign animal disease outbreak. While the science may not have changed much, the process has, he added.

"Everything that is done on any kind of emergency of any kind now has to happen under the National Response Plan," Ehart said, describing the bureaucracy involved. "From that, who's going to be involved is outlined and the resource phases as to how that's going to occur."

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The good news, Ehart said, is that every state has an emergency response plan and several have had training and practice exercises.

Greg Baxter, a third-generation cattle feeder from Grand Island, Neb., was recently involved with an on-site government assessment of bioterrorism vulnerability. He shared his insights at the FMD Issues Forum.

The Strategic Partnership Program Agroterrorism Initiative (SPPA) was

conducted in part at his feedlot to understand what it would take to be prepared in an emergency. Personnel from various agencies visited his operation for an in-depth tour, where they identified and discussed points of vulnerability from their various perspectives.

Henning, Ugstad, Ehart and Baxter made their comments Feb. 1 during the Issues Forums sponsored by Pfizer Animal Health during the 2007 Cattle Industry Annual

Convention and NCBA Trade Show. Each forum was repeated three times, allowing cattlemen to attend a session for three of the five topics presented. Audios and summaries of all five sessions will be available in the www.4cattlemen.com newsroom.



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