

Beef Talk: Don't take health for granted

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Finishing a holiday meal is a treat and enjoyed by many, but, unfortunately, not by all. The goal remains to somehow assure that everyone has access to safe and affordable food. The world would be a happier place if that were the case. While we reach out to better feed our

neighbors, we also need assurance that the progress we have made in feeding our neighbors remains intact.

Like it or not, the world of living things always is precariously close to death. The relationship between predator and prey is never very far away. Although we

generally prefer the movies with lions and wolves chasing wildebeests and deer, tiny predators are also always at work.

Viruses, bacteria and numerous other microorganisms or subparticles are part of the predator-prey relationship. Unlike the larger predators that can be seen and managed, the smaller predators can avoid detection by the naked eye. Their arrival often is a surprise and may come when least expected, especially because the movement of cattle and beef is complex.

Bugs can travel

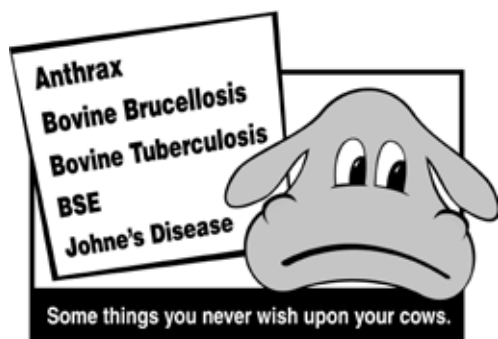
As producers seek an unencumbered market environment, that very environment also can function as a very efficient conduit for the many diseases that may affect cattle because buyers from around the world have the opportunity to bid on calves. We have the struggle between a totally free and unencumbered market vs. a market that has biological barriers in place that potentially inhibit the free movement of cattle.

Producers want to maximize business options and maintain the flexibility to market their stock by utilizing methods that effectively capture value for the producer and enhance that value to all links within the beef industry.

Producers have become keenly aware that traceback, which primarily is a function of health, sanitation and food safety, is critical to understanding the need to maintain fully effective health regulations vs. introducing new animal health risks, even when such restrictions may limit marketing options.

The challenge is that, as the calf goes, so goes all that to which the calf has been exposed. In other words, cattle have the potential to carry diseases they have been exposed to and could spread these diseases to susceptible herds. That may not be a big deal if the disease is a strain of the common cold, but that is certainly not true for all diseases.

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aware that traceback, which primarily is a function of health, sanitation and food safety, is critical to understanding the need to maintain fully effective health regulations vs. introducing new animal-health risks, even when such restrictions may limit marketing options.

The tracking of animals that cross borders is considered essential for the preservation and well-being of the industry. The introduction of a highly pathogenic disease, such as foot-and-mouth disease (FMD), would affect millions of animals and have devastating effects on markets and producers.

In addition to potential national disasters, other significant disease challenges exist. Examples include tuberculosis (*Mycobacterium bovis*) and Johne's disease (*Mycobacterium avium paratuberculosis*), which are chronic untreatable diseases affecting cattle, or anthrax (*Bacillus anthracis*), a disease that produces spores that may infect a premises and threaten cattle for years, if not decades.

A disease such as bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) is transmittable through feed and may take years to develop clinical signs, so cases must be traced back to the herd of origin to investigate the source. Memories are short and producers are busy, and even with the seriousness of BSE or the occasional tuberculosis (TB) outbreak, producers tend to dismiss the recurrence of a disease as something that is someone else's problem.

Traceability for health

Mandatory animal identification programs have been instituted in efforts to assist in containing bovine TB and brucellosis, which are zoonotic diseases with livestock, human and wildlife interfaces.

Producers and consumers know that these animal-health and public-health concerns will not be ignored. By way of the producers, the industry has well-qualified veterinary professionals and impeccable industry standards. Everyone involved will be vigilant and preparing diligently for a strong intervention and response should the need arise. Preventing the introduction of devastating socioeconomic diseases must remain a priority.

Whatever the issue, the national herd always must be protected from health risks. History has proven that the demand for and marketability of our nation's animals and products then easily follow. The beef industry always will need a modern, effective system of individual accountability. The industry also needs a system respectful of local concerns that has a

realistic response to pathogenic challenges, but is responsive to industry needs and consumer desires for animals and people.

Don't ever take for granted the watchful health system producers and the beef industry provide.

May you find all your ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at www.BeefTalk.com. For more information, contact the NDBCIA Office, 1041 State Ave., Dickinson, ND 58601, or go to www.CHAPS2000.com on the Internet.

