



Angus Stakes

► by **Shauna Rose Hermel**, editor

Take the lead on animal health

Last month I embarked on a series of columns addressing some of the challenges we face in the Angus industry. This issue's theme — animal health — in and of itself is one of the primary challenges of a seedstock operation. As seedstock producers you have the opportunity to take a leadership role in helping to safeguard the U.S. beef supply.

Complicating factors

The responsibility for herd health gets more complex every day as the world becomes smaller, population density increases, global marketing and travel become more common, and new disease threats emerge.

One of every nine people who ever lived is alive today. It used to take a year for a person to travel around the world. Now, it takes about 65 hours. Those are just a few of the facts shared at the National Institute for Animal Agriculture (NIAA) meeting this April by Michael Osterholm, director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy and associate director for the Department of Homeland Security National Center for Food Protection and Defense at the University of Minnesota.

As the distance, speed and frequency with which we travel increase, so does the threat of introducing foreign diseases — animal and human. We should not be surprised, Osterholm said, that the first human to contract the West Nile virus in the United States unloaded cargo planes for FedEx.

Osterholm brought to the meeting a warning to be prepared for the introduction of foreign animal diseases. It is not a matter of *if* but *when* they will emerge, he said,

adding that there will be more and they will be worse.

At that same meeting, Jimmy Tickle of North Carolina State University shared a simulation of what would happen if foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) were introduced to the United States in five locations as a terrorist attack. Based on current animal movements, within a month 40 states could be infected. It would take five days to identify the disease. By then 15 states could be infected.

That's not good news to those who recall images of the United Kingdom's experience with FMD. Tickle urged attendees to consider ramifications of a national stop movement in the United States. If you could stop movement, how would you restart it?

I'm not sure if it's disconcerting or reassuring to know how serious the disease experts are taking the threat of emerging diseases spread by incidental means and/or bioterrorism. One thing is sure — waiting until the disease is here to prepare will be too late. Most of the preparation will be done at the research level, but there are things producers can do now:

- Crack down on biosecurity on your farm and ranch, and encourage biosecurity measures to your customers;
- Be educated as to what potential diseases

are considered threats, and know their symptoms;

- Be alert to symptoms of disease in your herd;
- Be communicative and report symptoms to the proper authorities (not doing so could cause far worse problems); and
- Take ownership in the National Animal Identification System (NAIS), because it is being built to protect your livelihood.

Opportunities

No one is more prepared to take a leadership role in animal health and animal identification (ID) than seedstock producers. You have already developed the close relationship with your veterinarian. You have already developed the ID and recordkeeping systems. You can be an asset and an information resource to your seedstock-purchasing customers. Help show them the advantages beyond meeting ID requirements that they have access to through AngusSourceSM and the Beef Record Service (BRS).

Sites updated

We have given major updates to two of Angus Productions Inc.'s (API's) topic sites:

- www.angusinternational.info provides a portal to information about the Angus industry on a global basis. Find press releases and notices of events, as well as articles from the *Angus Journal* and other publications.
- www.countryoforiginlabeling.info carries news and information about country-of-origin labeling (sometimes referred to as COL or COOL). Under the current law, this spring's calf crop will need to be source-verified to be sold at retail next fall. This fact and recently introduced legislation will soon bring this topic to the forefront of discussions once again.

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