INDUSTRY

Beef Business

►A look at **current events** affecting the **cattle industry**

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H1N1 flu causes stir

News of escalating swine flu cases and fear of a potential pandemic put many nations on alert late April, as the World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed human cases worldwide, beginning in Mexico and spreading throughout North American and beyond.

Swine flu, a respiratory disease caused by type A influenza viruses, has traditionally been the cause of regular outbreaks among pigs. However, the variation of the virus, H1N1, is believed to be a mix of human and animal versions, infecting humans and spreading from person-to-person in the same way seasonal flu is spread.

While federal officials worked to stifle widespread alarm, the U.S. government distributed part of its antiviral stockpile to all states and Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack and others worked to calm fears with U.S. trading partners, saying pork and pork products remain safe.

Some trading partners, however, ignored U.S. reassurances. Russia, China, South Korea, Thailand, the Phillippines, Indonesia, Jordan and Japan all issued at least some form of ban or heightened restrictions, and Egypt took drastic action by slaughtering thousands of pigs.

H1N1 flu fears had detrimental effects on trading as well, sending hog futures contracts, corn futures and soybean contracts through a tailspin before stabilizing. Likewise, a widespread fear of travel sent airline and tourism stocks diving. Several nations issued travel warnings.

WHO raised the worldwide pandemic alert level to Phase 5, and the government and manufacturers began developing a vaccine.

The first confirmed case of Influenza A H1N1 in swine was discovered in a small hog herd in Alberta, Canada, in early May. Canadian animal health authorities quarantined the herd, and Secretary Vilsack said the discovery would not affect U.S. trade with Canada, adding that the agency would await confirmatory tests before considering any action.

At press time, University of Missouri Extension Economist Ron Plain told *Brownfield Network* the hog industry could expect a $400 million loss during the next few months.

Visit *www.cdc.gov/swineflu/* for the latest health information related to the H1N1 flu.

FDA to implement feed ban

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) plans to proceed with implementation of a new feed ban, according to the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA).

FDA is establishing a compliance date of Oct. 26, according to NCBA, to give renderers additional time to comply with the new regulations and allow producers more time to identify appropriate methods of disposal.

NCBA noted its displeasure with the announcement, saying FDA has not provided a means to resolve the disposal issues created by the rule.

For more information, visit *www.beefusa.org/news_resources.aspx.*

Cattle TB identified in Texas

Preliminary test results announced late April indicated that a dairy in west Texas was infected with bovine tuberculosis (TB). Animals from the 2,600-head dairy were being prepared for sale, and some reacted to TB skin tests. The follow-up blood tests on the animals also were positive.

The Texas Animal Health Commission has launched an epidemiological investigation to determine the source or possible spread of the disease.

Texas regained cattle TB-free status in fall 2006, after losing the coveted status in spring 2002. Although one TB-infected herd will not affect the state's status, two infected herds within a 48-month period will result in a loss of TB-free status.

USDA considers futuristic fencing technology

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Research Service (ARS) has agreed to grant an exclusive license to a Canadian firm for their interest in marketing a type of nonwire, virtual fencing technology for cows linked to global positioning.

The Directional Virtual Fencing (DVF) system sends electronic cues to a cow's ears so that it will move in a preferred direction. The system is automated so ranchers can give cues at any time and track movements from a computer. ARS has patented the technology based on experimental designs. ARS scientists are currently working on a commercially viable prototype. To view the report online with photos and video, visit *www.ars.usda.gov/is/pr/2009/090325.htm.*

Domestic cattle genome sequence debuts

An international consortium of researchers has published the genome of domestic cattle, the first livestock mammal to have its genetic blueprint sequenced and analyzed. Visit *www.usda.gov/2009/04/0125.xml* for more information.

Equine vet warns of CEM

Horse owners should be aware of a venereal disease in horses that can cause infertility in mares, according to a Kansas State University (K-State) equine veterinarian.

Contagious equine metritis (CEM) is a sexually transmitted, exotic disease of horses caused by the bacterium *Taylorella equigenitalis.* The disease is considered a foreign animal disease and although it has been eradicated more than once in the U.S., it has surfaced a few times since 1978.

More information about CEM is available on the USDA-APHIS web site, *www.aphis.usda.gov/newsroom/hot_issues/cem/.*

Washington Watch

President Obama directs USDA to expand biofuels

President Obama issued a presidential directive May 5 to Secretary Vilsack to aggressively accelerate the investment in and production of biofuels. On a conference call Vilsack announced that he will help lead an interagency effort, known as the Biofuels Interagency Working Group, to increase America's energy independence and spur rural economic development.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is reportedly set to establish four categories of renewable fuels, some of which would be produced from new sources.

In addition, President Obama directed Secretary Vilsack to expedite and increase production of and investment in biofuel development efforts by refinancing existing investments in renewable fuels and making renewable energy financing opportunities from the Food, Conservation and Energy Act of 2008 available.