

Cattle Health & Well-being

Committee discusses ramifications of potential live-animal imports from Brazil and Argentina, feedlot audits and antimicrobial use.

Story & photo by **Troy Smith**, field editor

Potential imports of beef and live cattle from South America, guidance for third-party audits of feedlots and potential regulation of antimicrobials were primary topics discussed by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) Cattle Health & Well-being Committee. NCBA policy committees met during the 2014 Cattle Industry Convention in Nashville, Tenn. Cattle Health & Well-being Committee members also heard reports from two working groups pertaining to herd biosecurity and emerging animal health concerns.

Guest speaker John Clifford, chief veterinary officer for USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), talked about agency efforts to safeguard the United States against introduction of animal disease through imports of food or live animals. Clifford offered an update on the global status of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD). He responded to concerns that APHIS is considering opening the United

States to imports of beef and cattle from Brazil and Argentina.

"I'm not here to change your minds about trade with South America. I am here to give you the facts," stated Clifford, noting

that regions within Brazil and Argentina are FMD-free, while other regions of both countries are not.

Clifford explained that FMD can spread among live cloven-hooved animals, and the causative organism can be present in bone-in meat or insufficiently cooked ground meat products that include lymph tissue and other "trimmings." None are currently accepted for import to the United States. However, APHIS recently announced that it is considering amendment of regulations to allow, under certain conditions, the importation of fresh beef from specific Brazilian states.

Committee members voiced concern regarding potential movement of cattle between FMD-free and non-FMD-free regions in South American countries. Discussion resulted in a resolution calling for NCBA to seek expert analysis of APHIS proposals and risk assessments associated

Emerging Cattle

New research on health and welfare were presented at working group.

Story & photo by **Kasey Brown**, associate editor

Health of cattle is imperative to the success of the beef industry, and research is continuously done to prevent or treat health issues. The National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA) Emerging Cattle Health Research and Issues Working Group highlighted some new research Feb. 5 at the 2014 Cattle Industry Convention in Nashville, Tenn.

The USDA Agriculture Research Service (ARS) is conducting many animal health projects, shared Eileen Thacker of the Veterinary Medical Science division. Some of the projects include antibiotic resistance, alternative medicines, tick-borne and parasitic diseases, anaplasmosis, diagnostics and food safety.

For instance, she mentioned that in food-safety research, salmonella was found in lymph nodes, not just in feces — meaning it has potential to go into ground beef from beef trim. It is speculated that biting flies are a source of the bacteria, and research is ongoing. If they can determine how salmonella is infiltrating cattle, it can be prevented.

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Shipping cattle to the mainland

Ashley Stokes, extension and research veterinarian for the University of Hawaii, presented research on stress when shipping cattle from Hawaii to the mainland. Hawaii is the most isolated landmass in the entire world, so cattle spend quite some time in specially designed "cowtainers." The Beef Quality Assurance (BQA)-funded study followed two shipments of cattle to the mainland, one to Washington and one to California.

Stokes explained that this project is being proactive on cattle welfare during transport, and she aims to protect and improve the shipping process.

The calves' temperatures were monitored,



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with amending rules governing imports of beef from Brazil.

Also approved was a resolution in response to fears that implementation of third-party feedlot audits, if required by beef processors, may result in a hodge-podge of audit protocols. The resolution recommended the current Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) feedlot assessment

as the guiding example for third-party audits.

Committee members heard a presentation from Kansas State University veterinarian Mike Apley, who offered a “regulatory heads-up” regarding antimicrobial use in meat-animal production. As a result of political pressure, livestock producers can look for tighter regulation of antimicrobials and particularly those administered through feed. Apley worries that Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) rule-making may not be driven by only science-based information. He said he fears that overregulation may eventually supersede use of veterinary-prescribed antimicrobial products.

“The question is whether veterinarians will retain relevancy to antimicrobial use decisions, or will political pressure drive regulation,” stated Apley.

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Working group discusses herd security

Group explores strategies for maintaining herd health security, with particular attention to bovine viral diarrhea (BVD).

Scheduled during the 2014 Cattle Industry Convention were meetings of “working groups,” which function as subcommittees of National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA) policy committees. The Beef Cattle Herd Security/BVD Working Group’s charge is to explore strategies for maintaining herd health security, with particular attention to bovine viral diarrhea (BVD), and report the NCBA’s Cattle Health & Well-being Committee.

Speakers at the meeting included Eileen Thacker, a research veterinarian with USDA’s Agricultural Research Service. Thacker spoke about ongoing BVD research, including studies of various strains of the disease virus found in the field, which are being compared with strains currently included in vaccines. Thacker said the objective is to determine if vaccine composition needs to change, based on prevalence of problematic strains of the BVD virus. Thacker also discussed research of the HoBi virus, which, due to its similarity to the BVD virus, could confuse test results.

Mississippi State University veterinarian David Smith spoke about risk analysis for herd security decision-making, outlining steps including risk assessment, risk mitigation and documentation of the process. Smith said risk analysis may reveal that, contrary to popular opinion, routine vaccination is not always justified economically. Factors influencing the decision include herd size, the level of risk presented by a specific disease, and the cost of vaccination compared with potential costs of a disease outbreak.

“There are situations where it may not be economically advantageous to vaccinate,” stated Smith. “The decision is unique to each operation. For some, a decision not to vaccinate may be logical.”

Also on the agenda was University of Hawaii veterinarian Ashley Stokes, who explained protocols associated with preparation and transport of weaned calves from Hawaii to feedlots on the mainland. Protocols address health, sanitation and nutrition, along with other management associated with nine-day shipment by sea.

University of Nebraska veterinarian and Working Group Chairman Dale Groteleuschen praised the Hawaii program as a good example of preconditioning, attention to animal well-being and biosecurity measures, which involves planning and execution of protocols before, during and after shipment.

Also announced during the meeting were plans for future BVD symposia to be convened in College Station, Texas, and Kansas City, Mo.

— Troy Smith, field editor

Health Issues



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as were temperature and humidity of the cowtainers during the trip. The cowtainers have feeders, waterers, ventilated windows, and ample space for the cattle to move and lie down, though not enough for them to get hurt when the cowtainer is moved. The cowtainers also had a camera to monitor behavior.

The study showed that the combination of temperature and humidity is key, and

neither reached the danger zone within the cowtainer. Body temperatures spiked during moments of stress, like loading and unloading, and when the cowtainer was moved. The stress of animals was monitored by substance P, white blood cell values and genetic evaluation with a micro ray. She said stress also showed small spikes during loading, unloading and moving the cowtainer, but the results showed that cattle overcame the stress quickly.

The design of the cowtainer, developed by cattlemen, really increases the welfare of the cattle, Stokes asserted. The cattle do not leave the cowtainer for the nine-day journey, but she said this actually increased their well-being. Constant access to feed and water, good ventilation, adequate space and daily cleaning kept the cattle comfortable, and reduced the potential for added stress and injury if they were unloaded again in O’ahu.

Future research will look at how preconditioning affects transportation, she concluded.

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Editor’s Note: This article contains information compiled from the Angus Journal’s online coverage of the 2014 Cattle Industry Convention and NCBA Trade Show, which is available online at www.4cattlemen.com.