

ANIMAL HEALTH AND OTHER LIVESTOCK ISSUES

The health of Oregon's livestock industry is critical to the economic and social well-being of all Oregonians. The state's livestock production represents more than \$1 billion in value to growers, including beef, dairy, eggs, sheep, goats, swine, equine, bees, and related products. The multiplier effect of this production is enormous across rural and urban economies.

If disease strike animals, it not only affects their well-being but, in some cases, can also impact humans. Growers take great effort to care for and provide proper nutrition and medical care to their animals and poultry.

Livestock producers, including domestic bird growers, have dealt with animal health and disease issues since animals were first domesticated. During the last century, researchers and veterinarians eradicated significant animal diseases. However, the struggle against animal disease continues today. Animal health and disease, like human health and disease, is constantly evolving and, in some disease cases, becoming more difficult to control.

Interest in personal health, combined with highly publicized human illness events connected to eating or handling animal products, has heightened grower

Safety precautions at county and state fairs

- *Fair managers check all paperwork to ensure animals are legally cleared to be in Oregon by meeting health requirements.*
- *All animals entering fairs are routinely checked by on-site veterinarians.*
- *Poultry and other avian species are being watched closely because of concerns with avian influenza. ODA will be using bird gatherings to do surveillance work in 2006-07.*
- *As part of a national surveillance plan, exhibitors with poultry and other domestic birds can expect an ODA technician to request permission for the birds be sampled and tested.*

It is important for exhibitors, and especially the fair-going public, to understand the high pathogenic H5N1 strain of avian influenza found in Asia and other parts of the world does not exist in the US today. It is not a pandemic virus and it does not spread easily from birds to humans. The surveillance effort is part of a larger undertaking, which includes a comprehensive monitoring of wild birds, to ensure the virus has not arrived.

In the past couple of years, special efforts have been made at Oregon county fairs to protect livestock against exotic newcastle disease in poultry, vesicular stomatitis in horses and cattle, a viral hemorrhagic disease in rabbits, and E. coli O157.

- *Signs will be posted encouraging people to wash their hands after interacting with animals, especially if they are going to consume food. It is also recommended to keep food away from areas where livestock are kept.*

and public concerns regarding animal health and diseases.

West Nile virus crossed the country in just a few years and currently presents risks in Oregon to unvaccinated horses and to



ODA staff provide animal disease preparedness training to Oregon Volunteer Emergency Response Team (OVERT) veterinarians.

some humans with compromised immune systems.

BSE or “mad cow” disease surfaced in many countries over the past several years, including the US and Canada, and seriously affected exports and imports of beef from various nations, despite the minimal risk associated with the small number of animals affected.

Avian influenza (AI), originating in China and spreading to other countries, has yet to reach the US. However, AI has alerted the agriculture and health communities to a potentially catastrophic virus that could affect millions of people if the barrier between bird and human is breached.

Producers of livestock and birds in the US have taken some of the strictest approaches possible in protecting their animals and the public. Many operations, including dairy, poultry, swine, and other livestock operations, require employees and any visitors to walk through a disinfectant shoe bath. Some require people to don protective clothing to prevent bringing pathogens onto livestock premises. Inspections and monitoring are on high alert. Federal, state, and local agencies nationwide are developing response plans for animals and humans in the event of an outbreak.

Methods for traceback of diseased animals is progressing at national and state levels through location/premise registration and animal tracking.

ODA's routine requirements helps stop the importation of unwanted animal diseases. A certificate of veterinary inspection and an Oregon import permit are mandatory for all animals coming in from other states.

Despite widespread media coverage of potential animal disease related issues, the US food system and animal-derived foods and related products remain the safest of anywhere in the world.

No matter how safe the farm or ranch, no matter how sanitary the processing facilities, no matter how fresh the meat at the store, if it isn't maintained at appropriate cold storage after purchase and heated to appropriate hot temperatures when cooked, all previous efforts are in vain and consumers place themselves at risk of harm.

Sanitary handling by consumers and food establishments, and proper chilling or cooking to appropriate temperatures remains one of the critical areas for ongoing education.

WILDLIFE DAMAGE

Oregon ranchers lost 400 adult cattle and 4,100 calves to predators in 2005, with a value of more than \$1.8 million. Mountain lions and bobcats took half of the adult cattle; one-quarter of the losses were to coyotes. For calves, over half of the losses were to coyotes and about one-third to mountain lions and bobcats.

(Oregon Agricultural Statistics Service, May 2006)

Wildlife damage cost Oregon farmers and ranchers \$158 million in harm to crops, livestock, and structures, according to a 1997 survey conducted by the Oregon Agricultural Statistics Service. Of that total, production losses of \$147.1 million occurred to crops and livestock production. Damage to structures totaled \$4.5 million. The cost of veterinary care for injured livestock reached \$214,000. And damage prevention expenses totaled \$6.0 million.

According to the survey, 47 percent of the state's farms reported some type of wildlife damages.

- http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Oregon/Publications/Livestock_Report/wildlife.pdf

Damage to crops is the most significant impact from wildlife. This includes both commercial crops as well as hay, pasture, and other livestock feed. Crop damage amounted to \$145.6 million. Deer, elk, geese and rodents caused the most damage to crops while predators, specifically coyotes, cougars and dogs, inflicted the most damage to livestock. Deer and elk were also responsible for about three-fourths of the damage to structures, mostly fences.

As an example, in 2006, elk damage to a Northeast Oregon potato field decreased the yield by 50 percent, as the animals dug up and ate the potatoes while tromping down the crop.

RUSTLERS

Yes, it still happens. Livestock thieves stole over 100 head of livestock in 2005. Use of permanent branding is still the best and widest used deterrent to cattle rustling.

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

Many cow-calf ranchers support labeling of beef and other meat products by country of origin, just as is done for many other foods and manufactured goods. They believe consumers will choose domestic beef and other meats if given the choice over imported products.

The concept of mandatory labeling is opposed by meat processors and retailers who argue that meat is commingled, and that tracking origin and labeling would be too costly and problematic to implement. They favor a voluntary system for products that lend themselves to tracking. Congress passed a mandatory country of origin labeling program in 2003, but opposing interests were able to stop funding for enforcement of the program and delayed the implementation for several years.

MARKET ACCESS

After one initial case of "mad cow disease," or BSE, documented in 2003 in a Washington state dairy animal, several foreign markets were shut to US beef exports. A second cow was found positive for BSE in Texas in 2005. Since then, eight cows in Canada have been identified positive for BSE, while at least 29 cows in Japan have been found with the disease. Ironically,



Japan was the number one export market for US beef and has banned US beef since 2003, although limited access has recently been granted.

USDA, FDA, and other federal agencies, along with state-level veterinary efforts, have increased surveillance and monitoring of ruminant-to-ruminant feed bans and susceptible cattle. The best present science and monitoring data indicate there is less than one infected cow per one million head of livestock. Present monitoring will keep such animals out of the human food chain and minimize any risks to the population.

LACK OF PROCESSING FACILITIES IN OREGON

Aside from small-scale custom processing, there are no large animal processing facilities in Oregon. This means virtually all cattle are shipped out of state—to Idaho, Washington, or California—for processing, adding transportation costs and physical toll on animals to be shipped. This ends up eroding profitability for Oregon livestock producers.

Processing facilities are difficult to site and finance. Recent efforts to place such facilities in Oregon have met with resistance from local citizens or officials. A couple potential processing facility projects are still proposed, but no one is turning dirt in the near term.

LACK OF RENDERING FACILITIES

Oregon's last and only rendering facility that handles the disposal of dead livestock, including beef and dairy animals, horses, etc., closed in September 2006. There remains an immense challenge on how to handle disposal of dead animals and offal from small-scale custom processing facilities and meat shops. Burying, burning, composting, and taking animals to the dump all have challenges that are costly, limited in effectiveness, and present other concerns related to groundwater and potential disease.

Industry, state and local government officials, and other interested parties are meeting to evaluate options and ideas. But, this situation presents no easy alternatives and demonstrates that rendering may need to be a function of government.