

Mitigation of Foreign Animal Disease

A common misperception is that livestock diseases in other countries also threaten only the U.S. livestock industry. These diseases threaten countries throughout the world and must be addressed as global problems. Transboundary diseases can be introduced to a country via trade, tourism or terrorism.

Each year more than 2 million tourists travel between the United States and the Dominican Republic, where hog cholera became endemic after it was introduced from Cuba several years ago. Preventing naïve tourists from bringing back meat products is impossible. Therefore, as with any type of disaster, it is best to prepare for the inevitable eventuality that transboundary diseases will infect U.S. animals.

The current concern with bioterrorism should not exclude the impact that intentional introduction of a transboundary animal disease could have on the United States. The potential for this is higher than the possibility of the introduction of a human disease because it is easier to bring in animal diseases. An outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) or swine fever would stop all livestock trade between the United States and other countries. The estimated cost of a well-controlled outbreak of FMD in California is more than \$7 billion. Spreading the agents of transboundary diseases does not require the sophisticated technologies that would be needed for the effective dissemination of anthrax, for example.

The reintroduction of transboundary diseases to the United States is simply a matter of time. Effective mitigation goes to the root of the problem, rather than just preparing a response. The best mitigation against transboundary diseases is to support the growth and education of the veterinary profession in developing countries so that these veterinarians can gain skills needed for disease surveillance and eradication. Additionally, support for other countries' livestock, agriculture, and veterinary science programs shows that the United States is an economic partner, not just a user. Such an approach benefits all.