

Preparedness for a Foreign Animal Disease Outbreak

By applying the principles of all-hazards planning, effective preparedness lies in education that targets vulnerable populations and is conducted at appropriate times. Education has developed awareness about many natural disasters. For example, livestock producers know the value of paying attention to weather reports and the risk of flooding, blizzards, and high winds. To some degree, the media bring disease disasters to the attention of producers by discussing topical issues that are a threat to production efficiency. The United Kingdom has programs that alert producers to the seasonal risk of certain diseases and give information on prevention, such as weather data to predict the most effective days to deworm against *Hemonchus contortus* in sheep.

Educational programs that alert livestock producers to the risk of epizootic and transboundary diseases should be based on epidemiologic data. In addition, trust should be built so that if producers suspect a transboundary disease problem, they are confident that they can call officials without being chastised or endangering their business.

Successful preparedness has two approaches. First, the recognition of potential transboundary diseases has to become a routine part of a farmer's life. This is possible only if investigations of suspected disease outbreaks become more common. The expected result of an investigation should be that the suspicion will prove groundless. Familiarity with the investigative process will instill greater confidence in farmers that they and their neighbors will not automatically have their livelihood threatened if the possibility of disease is investigated.

Second, the livestock industry must be educated about what impact a transboundary disease would have in the United States and what the industry's role is in preventing such an occurrence and spread. Transboundary diseases should be part of the curriculum in every agricultural degree program offered at schools, colleges, and universities. Practicing veterinarians should have more training in the recognition of transboundary diseases. It is reasonable to require accredited veterinary practices to have reference material (or access to Internet sites) readily available that clearly describes the diseases, how to differentiate them, samples required for confirmation, and procedures for notification and elimination. Such information is analogous to the information on Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDSs) required by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration for all hazardous materials.