Does Your Dairy Farm Have an Emergency Plan for a Foot and Mouth Disease Outbreak?

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The recent new outbreak of foot and mouth disease (FMD) in the United Kingdom (U.K.) suggests the possibility that a similar outbreak could occur in the U.S. in spite of the safeguards that are in place. In fact, FMD is endemic in Asia, Africa, Middle East, and parts of South America. So what steps do you need to take to guard against FMD and to be prepared for a potential outbreak in the U.S.? These actions should be considered part of your farm emergency management plan to reduce risks to your business. If your business was in the U.K. today, what steps would you take and how quickly could you implement them? Further, what role might you have should a FMD outbreak occur?

In the Michigan Dairy Review article “What to Expect with a Foot and Mouth Disease Outbreak.” (2), four roles for producers during a FMD outbreak were listed.

1. Surveillance and knowing who to call
2. Screening and/or stopping traffic on and off your farm
3. Being aware of official status reports and notices from authorities
4. Cooperating and working with authorities as requested

In this article, we discuss some details of 1 and 2 and encourage you to include them as part of your everyday biosecurity efforts. Read on to see why.

Biosecurity and Emergency Management

Biosecurity is part of an overall farm emergency management plan (3). Biosecurity includes disease surveillance (checking your animals), traffic control, disinfecting shoes/boots and cleaning vehicles and equipment. Other aspects of biosecurity include isolating new animals, buying animals from a reputable single source when possible, screening animals for diseases, maintaining a sound vaccination program, and establishing controls for insects, rodents, birds, and wildlife.
Emergency management experts recommend developing plans that cover many types of events to reduce costs and increase benefit of your efforts. This way, your FMD strategy will be part of a plan that also includes avoiding exposure to common diseases such as IBR, BVD, and Johne’s.

1- Surveillance and know who to call

Because FMD can spread very quickly, early detection is very important to stop an outbreak. This is where you, your employees and your family play a key role along with your veterinarian. It is important that you and employees be familiar with the signs associated with FMD. It is not necessary to accurately identify FMD, but that you quickly call your veterinarian if you see suspicious signs (1,2,4). Post emergency phone numbers in your farm office for your veterinarian, the Michigan Department of Agriculture, State Police and other entities. The Be Aware Be Prepared campaign placard, which was distributed last year, is appropriate for this purpose. Periodically review the signs of FMD, and include it as part of employee training along with who to call in various emergencies. Your herd veterinarian should be your point of first contact for any suspicious health issues with your animals. If you notice signs that resemble FMD, call your veterinarian as soon as possible. Your quick action may help to reduce the impact on the entire livestock industry.

2- Screening traffic: this ounce of prevention should be a daily effort

Stringent biosecurity measures are in place for commercial poultry and swine operations. Traffic control is used to stop disease at the farm gate and it is their front line defense against a number of diseases. This involves controlling traffic by directing visitors to a designated parking area, having them sign in, screening for recent visits to other farms, and having them disinfect their boots or wear disposable boots. Dairy and other livestock operations need to move in this direction. Start by controlling traffic and directing visitors to an established visitor parking area by using signs, fencing, gates and perhaps closing some entry points to your farm. Because you stop FMD using the same methods as for many other diseases, this is an all-hazard approach. This means a routine, daily effort to minimize exposure to disease.

Screen and restrict visitors to your farm who have been in other countries and back in the U.S. for less than one week. Better yet, consider adding a sign like the one which is under development by the MDA, MSU and industry “Be Aware Be Prepared” Working Group, and ask all visitors about recent farm and animal contacts. In addition to screening visitors, boots should be disinfected upon entry and exit of your facilities or disposable boots should be provided (6). Grooms and Ross (6) list effective disinfectants for FMD virus.

Traffic Control During a FMD Outbreak

If there is a FMD outbreak, the level of traffic control needed on your farm will depend upon the situation, requirements by authorities, and your level of vigilance to protect your business. If an outbreak occurs in the U.S., the risk of FMD infecting your premises will increase. So stopping cattle movement on and off your premises, cleaning vehicles and equipment, and stopping individuals from entering your facilities without clearance and sanitation makes good business sense. This restriction could be required by USDA and MDA. Potentially, all traffic on and off farms could be ordered stopped by authorities for a period of time. Depending on the existing state of emergency, this could mean no milk trucks, feed trucks, and restrictions on personal vehicles going on and off farms.

If your farm is under quarantine or within a surveillance zone, certain requirements will apply. Strict biosecurity protocols will need to be followed for all individuals entering a premise suspected or known to have FMD and on surrounding farms in a designated area. Humans exposed to FMD need to not visit other livestock facilities within 5 days or more. Understanding and following these requirements are critical to minimize the possibility of spreading FMD to additional premises. It is important that you discuss what strategies you would employ during such an emergency and discuss what to expect from authorities. Being informed ahead of time puts you in a better position to use good judgment, have the needed equipment/plan to barricade (wagons, caution tape, NO ENTRY signs) your driveway(s), and to assist in effective response and recovery efforts. These circumstances would not be easy for you, your family or employees, and knowing what to expect helps people successfully work through an outbreak of a disease like FMD.

Summary

It may be unlikely that FMD will infect your premises but if it occurs in the U.S., you will be affected because of the devastating economic impact. The reason we are writing on this topic is because FMD is devastating. Plans you need to make to be prepared also will reduce the risk of other diseases and we want you to take ACTION, if you don’t already have a plan!

You and your employees need to know the signs of FMD, and what to expect from government officials working to eradicate FMD. You need to have a plan to control and stop traffic on and off your premises during a FMD outbreak and to operate for several days to several weeks with restrictions on animals, vehicles, and possibly people on or off your farm. Most importantly, you should consider routinely screening visitors and disinfecting their boots just as commercial poultry and swine operations do. Be Aware, Be Prepared!

References


(4,5,7,8).

**Online Resources**


Michigan Veterinary Medical Association Emergency Preparedness resources are compiled at <http://www.michvma.org/index.cfm?id=222>.

The Center for Food Security and Public Health at Iowa State University: <http://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/>.


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