



BIOTERRORISM

The United States enjoys the safest food supply in the world. From the time an animal is born there are restrictions on which drugs, chemicals and feedstuffs can be used or fed to animals in the United States. This is monitored by various governmental agencies including the Food and Drug administration which regulates antibiotics, the United States Department of Agriculture which regulates vaccines, and state departments of agriculture which regulates feed and feed mills. When an animal is delivered to a market a Veterinarian or trained lay person will examine each animal before it is sold. All Veterinarians and Auction market Veterinarians in particular are trained to identify foreign animal diseases (diseases that are currently not present in the U.S.) Auction market Veterinarians quarantine any suspected cases of foreign animal disease and notify Federal Veterinarians for confirmation. At the slaughter plant sick animals are withheld from slaughter. Federal Veterinarians are present in every slaughter plant and inspect every carcass to ensure that the animal was healthy and that the meat is wholesome. If there is any question that the animal was unhealthy or there is a problem with the meat the carcass is condemned and is not used for human consumption. Veterinarians in slaughter plants have the authority to even stop the chain or the entire plant.

In addition to these safeguards the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS, a branch of the USDA) has extensive regulations in place on importation of animals into the U.S. The United States has the most stringent requirements of any country for importation of animals. The purpose of these requirements is to protect the U.S. from diseases which have never been found in the U.S. such as Foot and Mouth disease, and to protect the U.S. from disease that we have eradicated but are found elsewhere in the world such as Pseudorabies, Brucellosis, Hog Cholera, etc. APHIS has a large team of Federal Veterinarians that can be mobilized to deal with outbreaks of disease within the United States. Recent examples of such efforts are the outbreak of Exotic Newcastle disease in the west coast states. APHIS also conducts research on these exotic diseases to increase recognition and rapid diagnostic confirmation and study potential vaccines, treatment and emergency planning to limit spread.

What has changed since 9/11?

Since the World Trade Center disaster of September 11th, 2001 the entire nation has been on in increased level of terrorism alert. Homeland Security has gone from a buzz phrase to a governmental agency, security at airports is increased and we as a nation function under terrorism warnings. The Federal authorities recognize the importance and value of a safe and economical food supply. In fact our food supply is the envy of the world. There is great potential to hurt the United States by attacking our

food supply. Because the introduction of a foreign animal disease has the potential to disrupt our food markets, APHIS has increased their vigilance. They have increased their staff, increased communication with private practice Veterinarians and are offering refresher Exotic Animal Disease Courses, E-mail communication, and Exotic Animal Disease information.

What does this mean for Joe Sheepfarmer? Your Federal and State Governments and your veterinarian are working hard to help keep your flock safe from Foreign Animal Diseases. Your help is also needed. In the U.S. we do well in preventing the entrance of foreign disease by monitoring plans and severely restricting importation of animals and animal products (semen, embryos, meat). We, as a country, do a poor job of restricting importation of people. One only needs to visit an international airport to view the vast number of travelers from foreign lands. As a producer you can help the U.S. prevent introduction of foreign animal diseases by restricting international visitors to your farm. APHIS and your State Board of Animal Health has signs available to post at shows and exhibitions that alert foreign tourists of the potential threat they pose by entering the barns. At home quarantine of animals returning home from shows or new flock additions is always a good idea as well. Biosecurity measures such as washing boots, trailers and not wearing your chore clothes to town are simple steps that can also protect your farm. Sheep producers have not placed great emphasis on these steps in the past. Perhaps as we consider the events of 9/11 and the potential harm that terrorists can do to our animal industry we need rethink some basic biosecurity measures to protect our farms and country.