

Regional VS in the Year of Foot and Mouth Disease

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Recent outbreaks of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) in the United Kingdom and other countries (France, Colombia, Argentina, Saudi Arabia, Netherlands, Ireland) have focused attention on the importance of biosecurity measures at all levels of animal agriculture in the United States. International entry points, including airports and seaports, are the control points that continue to receive the greatest attention. Prevention of disease entry whether via people, livestock, or products at these locations is very important. However, points of entry are not where the first case of FMD will be seen. That first case will occur on a dairy, ranch, feedlot or swine operation far removed from that entry point in both time and distance. It cannot be over emphasized that the early diagnosis of a case of FMD is the key to controlling its spread and ultimately its eradication. Producers have the highest probability of observing that first case and are on the frontlines of the battle to keep foreign animal diseases from spreading if it were to arrive in the U.S.

Maintaining vigilance for Foot and Mouth Disease by dairy producers in Colorado and other southwestern states is more important than just about anywhere else in the U.S. and particularly right now as the late spring and summer approaches. Why? Foot and Mouth Disease and Vesicular Stomatitis (VS) look exactly the same and both are reportable diseases requiring immediate action of state or federal animal health officials. The most experienced producer, veterinarian or pathologist cannot distinguish between these two diseases by observing an affected animal. Blood and other types of tests are required to differentiate the two diseases. In 1995, 1997 and 1998 Colorado and other western states experienced outbreaks of VS. Hundreds of farms were placed under quarantine, livestock markets were temporarily closed and fairs and shows were affected. Many dairies chose to use an unproven vaccine to provide some level of protection. Most of the animals affected in these outbreaks were horses. No dairies were affected in Colorado during the outbreaks of the 1990's and only 1 dairy (in New Mexico) was affected in the U.S. in any of the outbreaks.

If you observe cows salivating or hanging their tongues out of their mouths or notice ulcers in their mouths, on their coronary bands or on their teats contact your veterinarian immediately. In the event that another outbreak of Vesicular Stomatitis occurs this year, don't believe that what you might be seeing in your animals is "just VS". It might be VS, it might be FMD, either way it can cause devastation to your herd and to the entire dairy industry.

For the latest information on Foot and Mouth Disease,
visit the following websites:
<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/>
<http://www.maff.gov.uk/>