

Paranoia Can Overwhelm Common Sense Solutions

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“When will spring arrive?” That was the common question one heard as this week started out. The calendar says spring is here, but the temperatures, at least in the northern Plains, have not been “springlike.” Beef producers are hoping that, in concert with the arrival of new calves, the weather will warm up and Mother Nature will take on a momentary gentleness.

This is all part of the annual cycle of rural life, a cycle often reflected in the peacefulness of farm and ranch life. This peacefulness, however, seems to become more and more distorted in time.

Human interaction with animals of all kinds seems to be taking on a strange level of paranoia. The March 18 issue of *New Scientist* (Vol. 189, No. 2543) reported on Page 7 that people in France and Germany are turning their cats in to animal shelters out of fear their animals will catch the bird flu. Cats do eat birds and cats have been shown to be at high risk, but other animals are at risk as well.

The abandonment appears to be a response to paranoia, an uneducated reaction, instead of an educated response that involves even a dash of common sense. All too often, human reaction is embedded paranoia, often handicapping the real need for response.

In the same issue of *New Scientist*, there was some good news on Page 16. The story noted how rapidly the incidence of BSE (mad cow disease) has declined, given the better understanding and proper management response to the disease.

These stories and reports can lead cattle producers to ponder just how much of the national animal identification system efforts are embedded in paranoia or are an educated response to true needs and based on common sense. The pathways are certainly not very clear and seem to be getting even more befuddling.

And to top it all off, new regulations seem to be filtering out of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration’s Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition. These regulations apply to “persons (excluding farms, restaurants and certain others) who manufacture, pro-

cess, pack, transport, distribute, receive, hold, or import food.” The new rules detail “records that must be kept ... to identify the immediate previous sources and immediate subsequent recipients of food, including its packaging, in order to address credible threats of serious adverse health consequences or death to humans or animals.” (www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/fsbtac23.html)

The purpose of this fact sheet indicates the following: “This regulation implements the recordkeeping authority in the Bioterrorism Act.” There is the initial sigh of relief when one notes farms are excluded, but that is quickly followed by a gasp when animal feed is included.

The full impact is that producers who sell hay or are involved in the animal feed industry will be required to keep records that allow quick, effective trace back should evidence of a credible threat surface. Such records would not be much different than those required of livestock producers who sell cattle into the food chain.

This may be a well-intended thought, but the complexity of the maze is certainly getting deep. No one can argue with the concept, but the implementation and subsequent execution and verification of implied expectations is mind-bending.

These “new” regulations have been in the works since the initial response to Sept. 11, 2001. To say the regulations are new is not true. Reviewing the FDA Web site, the information is essentially old news, with what remains being the simple reporting of final regulations. As a producer keeping up on all these identification expectations, perhaps our demise is not in the actual tragic event, but in the overwhelming response to fear.

May you find all your NAIS-approved ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at www.BeefTalk.com. For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to www.CHAPS2000.com on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0292.

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