

Special welfare concerns for countries dependent on live animal trade: the real Foreign Animal Disease emergency for Canada by Terry L. Whiting, Office of the Chief Veterinarian (Manitoba) no date.

Whiting TL. Foreign animal disease outbreaks, the animal welfare implications for Canada: Risks apparent from international experience. *Can Vet J.* 2003;44:805–815.
Terry Whiting, Welfare slaughter of livestock in emergency situations, *Can Vet J.* 2006 August; 47(8): 737.

An outbreak of a foreign animal disease such as foot and mouth disease or classic swine fever would represent a significant threat to the Manitoba hog production industry. In the last decade outbreaks of these highly contagious diseases in Taiwan, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands have led to a restructuring of industries in some cases and widespread public debate over the future of the industries. The impact of such diseases would be particularly significant for Manitoba, given the provincial hog industry's dependence on export markets for live pigs since an outbreak would likely lead to border closures. The loss of access to export markets would likely result in the massive killing of health animals and a sharp drop in the price of slaughter pigs.

In Canada, the first step in any response to a disease outbreak would be to attempt to stamp out the disease by killing the infected animals: this would be accompanied by measures intended to trace, vaccinate, and quarantine or slaughter animals that had been in contact with infected animals. In Canada, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency has responsibility for overseeing these measures, including ordering the destruction of animals and paying compensation for infected animals or animals that had come into contact with infected animals.

Such a disease outbreak would likely lead to a closing of the US border to Canadian hogs. This would create a financial problem for hog producers who would no longer have market access. It would further create an on-farm crisis as the numbers of hogs rapidly surpassed the holding capacity of hog barns. Within 96 hours of the closing

of the US border (either because of disease in Canada or a U.S. state) the population of isoweans in Manitoba and Ontario would reach a crisis point. The response in other jurisdictions has been to kill these healthy animals in what is termed welfare slaughter. Responsibility for the carrying out of such a slaughter has not been included in any current North American disease emergency plans. The cost of welfare slaughter can dramatically outstrip the cost of stamping out the disease. Intensive animal production industries that are geared towards export markets have among the highest welfare slaughter costs. For example, the cost of the welfare slaughter in response to the 1997-1998 outbreak of classic swine fever in The Netherlands was \$852-million US, while the cost of stamping out infected herds was \$104-million US. It is estimated the cost of stamping out a small a small foot and mouth outbreak in Canada (one that affected 10,000 animals) would amount to only one per cent of the total financial impact of the outbreak.

In other jurisdictions controversies have arisen in relation to the lack of veterinarians, the lack of skilled personnel to slaughter animals (ideally infected animals should be slaughtered within 24 hours of identification and animals in herds that have made contact with infected animals within 48 hours), method of slaughter, and carcass disposal.

While the CFIA has responsibility for the suppression of the disease on infected farms, Canada lacks both the framework and the funding to deal with the animal welfare issues arising from an infectious foreign animal disease outbreak. Without effective welfare measures in place, it may not be possible to eliminate the disease: a result that could lead to the collapse of the industry. (Adequate slaughter capacity also makes it

possible for a region to be declared disease free in a relatively short period. As a result, Quebec, which slaughters most of the pigs raised in the province would experience a shorter period of border closing than Manitoba.)

Furthermore, a border closure due to disease in the US would create a severe animal welfare problem without engaging in the federal government in the responses.

The welfare slaughter and associated costs that accompanied swine fever and foot and mouth disease outbreaks in other jurisdictions have led to reduce public support for those industries. In the Netherlands, the government adopted a policy intended to reduce the size of the industry and strictly license its operation.

The Manitoba government took a positive step in 2006 when it amended the Manitoba Animal Diseases Act to allow the Chief Veterinary Officer to authorize welfare slaughter of livestock in emergency situations.

Comments

Whiting's recommendations are relatively general: he calls for a comprehensive federal provincial territorial agri-food disaster response initiative and the creation of a national director of animal health and welfare .

He says that the livestock industries, which are organized at the provincial level, must engage with local emergency measures organization to be able to provide leadership in preparing for a foreign animal disease outbreak.

Some questions for Whiting might be

- 1) What is the industry's responsibility to prepare for this?
- 2) Can measures be taken to reduce the risk of border closing (which by and large is likely to be ineffective?)