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“Beef Production Strategies” article

Mississippi Animal Disease and Disaster Preparedness

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The newly launched Mississippi Animal Disease and Disaster Preparedness Program sign-up form first appeared in *Cattle Business in Mississippi* last month. This is a very simple and useful program for interested producers. The basic concept of the program is the development of a state-level producer contact list that could be used to assist livestock producers in the event of an animal health disease event or disaster.



Be a Part of the Solution

It is very important that Mississippi livestock producers move forward as an industry to safeguard the health of our herds. The danger of a contagious disease outbreak in the national cow herd, whether by natural occurrence or terrorist attack, makes it imperative that the location of producers and their herds be readily available to animal health officials. Producer cooperation is essential for rapid disease response in the instance of a contagious disease outbreak.

Rapid response to disease events is critical to maintain the health of the state herd. Not only do certain diseases endanger the entire industry, they could cripple our nation's economy. Diseases such as Foot and Mouth Disease, Bovine TB or Johne's Disease have far-reaching potential for major economic impact on cattle producers. Quick and effective disease containment is vital for keeping a disease from affecting additional producers. For further information on animal health risk management, visit the Center for Food Security and Public Health at Iowa State University website at www.cfsph.iastate.edu. This website is an excellent producer resource that includes general prevention recommendations that beef or dairy operations can implement to decrease the risk of disease entry or spread on farm.

Another benefit of enrollment in the Mississippi Animal Disease and Disaster Preparedness Program is that it gives state animal health officials contact information to coordinate aid and relief efforts for natural disasters such as hurricanes. Hurricanes, tornados, and floods are just a few of the possible relevant scenarios in Mississippi that should stimulate producer appreciation for this aspect of the program. A similar state-level program in Colorado has already paid off in helping cattle producers in times of disaster. In early 2007, Colorado ranchers with registered farms were called by the Colorado Department of Agriculture's State Veterinarian's Office during recent blizzards. Those phone calls helped locate animals and find out if they have had access to feed. Emergency hay drops then followed. Similarly, a state-level animal disease and disaster

preparedness program here at home will be invaluable when severe weather or other disasters in Mississippi threaten animal agriculture.

How the Program Works

Step 1) Fill out a producer registration form.

A producer registration form is included in this magazine. These forms are also available from the Mississippi Board of Animal Health. Filling out a producer registration form means making basic contact available to state animal health officials for use only in the event of an animal health emergency. An online version of the form is available at the following website: msucares.com/livestock/beef/index.html. The Mississippi State University Extension Service can assist producers in obtaining and filling out these forms as well. These forms are being distributed throughout the state, so look for them at local feed stores and livestock markets.

Step 2) Return your completed producer registration form to the State Veterinarian's office at the Mississippi Board of Animal Health.

Completed producer registration forms can be mailed, faxed, e-mailed, or completed online. Contact information for the State Veterinarian's office is included on the producer registration form. The Mississippi Board of Animal Health website at www.mbah.state.ms.us is another source for this information. The form is also designed as a prepaid postage self-mailer for producer convenience.

Step 3) Receive your unique producer registration confirmation in the mail. You are now covered under the program.

A randomly generated unique producer registration number will be assigned to your producer registration form. You will receive a letter from the State Veterinarian's office confirming receipt of your producer registration information and notifying you of your producer registration. In the event of an animal health emergency, this information will be used to rapidly respond to the emergency to protect your animals and Mississippi's livestock industries. Otherwise, this basic contact information will sit in a database at the Mississippi Board of Animal Health.

What does it cost to sign up?

Enrollment in the program is free of charge to Mississippi livestock producers. The only cost is a few minutes of your time to complete the sign-up process. This is a small price to pay for protecting the health of animal agriculture in Mississippi.

Why should I register my farm?

In an animal health emergency, no one can help you protect your animals if they do not know you are there. This basic contact information opens the lines of communication between producers and animal health officials. Registering your farm means that you will be alerted quickly when there is a potential disease threat to your animals. You then have the information and assistance you need to take action and protect your animals and your investment.

Where will the producer contact information be stored?

The State Veterinarian's office at Mississippi Board of Animal Health will be responsible for keeping the data on file. The information provided as part of this state animal disease preparedness program will only be accessed on an as-needed basis by animal health officials in the event of an animal health emergency.

Take the time to review and complete the Mississippi Animal Disease and Disaster Preparedness form in this issue of *Cattle Business in Mississippi*. An equine version of the program and form is available as well. This program could be invaluable in protecting your livestock operation if an animal disease or disaster occurred in Mississippi in the future. For more information on beef cattle production, contact your local Extension office.