

Cattle farmers meeting high standards on farms

Part of running a successful farm is constantly making improvements. Two practical ways beef producers have been improving their operations is through joining the Verified Beef Production (VBP) program and building quarantine pens on their farms with help from funding available through *Growing Forward 2's* Growing Assurance – Food Safety On-Farm program.

"The Verified Beef Production program is a key program in our industry right now," says Melinda German, general manager at Manitoba Beef Producers. "It allows our producers to access *Growing Forward 2* funding to bring in equipment and improve biosecurity and on-farm food safety measures."

Verified Beef Production is Canada's verified on-farm food safety program for beef. It is a grass-roots driven and industry-led program that upholds consumer confidence in the products and good practices of Canadian beef producers by demanding high standards in on-farm food safety and biosecurity.

The program is designed to reduce or eliminate the possibility of a food safety concern on a beef cattle operation. It covers animal health management, cattle shipping, medicated feed, pesticide control and training or communications.

Vienna Kinkead, co-owner of a cattle farm in the Interlake area, is one farmer who has received support to partially cover VBP program audit costs and to purchase a single animal scale so she can make sure she administers the correct amount of medication.

She says the program will help open doors to larger markets and help her family improve and expand their farm.

"We've always tried to keep our cattle pure, joining the Verified Beef Production program gives us recognition for doing a lot of the things that we were already doing," she says. "The funding available through *Growing Forward 2* is a great opportunity."

Quarantine pens reducing risk of disease

Another farm improvement that many cattle farmers have been bringing to their farm is a dedicated quarantine pen.

MAFRD extension veterinarian Dr. Wayne Tomlinson recommends keeping new animals in quarantine for 28 days and watching for signs of all diseases but mostly diarrhea or pneumonia. If an animal doesn't show any symptoms of being sick, then it is likely safe to slowly introduce it to the rest of the herd. Producers may also want to do blood tests on new animals in quarantine to rule out additional diseases.

"Quarantining new animals and being careful which ones are introduced to the farm goes a long way in mitigating risk," says Tomlinson. "It is good practice to only accept animals from environments that have equal or higher biosecurity and health standards than those you implement on your farm."

Every year brings improved biosecurity to Manitoba farms, as more and more producers are learning and implementing the best way to reduce their risks and keep their animals healthy. ■

Premises Identification helps reduce the impact of gas outage

Jake Wiebe, chair of the board for Manitoba Chicken Producers



When there is an emergency in Manitoba involving animals every second counts. Be it a flood, wildfire or animal disease, Manitoba's Premises Identification (PID) Program is what gives government, industry organizations and producers the ability to act fast to spread knowledge and reduce the impact.

A traceability system is built on three pillars: premises identification, animal identification and movement reporting. The gas outage near Otterburne, Manitoba in January 2014 showed the value of PID, as the industry was required to respond quickly to keep poultry and livestock healthy.

The outage cut off fuel supply to areas around St-Pierre-Jolys, Grunthal and New Bothwell for a few days, leaving

some without heat just as the temperature plunged to -40 degrees Celsius.

Particularly affected by the emergency were poultry producers, especially those with young chicks who could not withstand even a slight dip in temperature.

Quick identification in emergencies

Manitoba's PID program maps out parcels of land where livestock and poultry are grown, kept, assembled or disposed of. All owners and operators of premises with livestock and poultry must supply basic land and contact information by completing an application.

The land information is validated to ensure it is correct in the system and a unique national number is assigned to each premises.

"Using premises identification, we were able to map out producers that were affected by the gas outage," says Heather Martens, traceability co-ordinator with Manitoba Agriculture, Food and Rural

Development (MAFRD). She explained that information was provided to Manitoba Chicken Producers who were able to alert their members.

Jake Wiebe, chair of the board with Manitoba Chicken Producers remembers the emergency well as his farm near New Bothwell was affected.

"In my case, I was aware about six hours before I was without heat," says Wiebe. "My birds were 10 days old at the time so still running a temperature of about 29 degrees Celsius."

Because of PID he says they weren't scrambling to see where everyone was located, which included approximately 50 chicken producers. They were able to get in contact with producers and many people chipped in to find heaters and help others.

"We were able to report that we had absolutely no incidents at all," says Wiebe. "Everyone was able to heat their barns through the crisis until the gas lines were functioning again."

"Though it is mandatory for livestock and poultry premises to be identified, there are still some who haven't completed an application yet," says Martens. "We want to encourage producers to identify where their livestock and poultry are located because we can't contact the premises we don't know about in an emergency."

There is no cost to get a PID number. The application form can be filled out in

less than a few minutes and is available online at manitoba.ca/agriculture/pid or from a local MAFRD GO Office.

Traceability part of food safety and animal health

Traceability is for more than just emergencies however. It is part of a functioning animal health and food safety system. The remaining two pillars of traceability, animal movement recording and animal identification, are at various stages of implementation across the livestock and poultry industries.

For cattle farmers, individual animal tracking is managed by the Canadian Cattle Identification Agency (CCIA). CCIA's system uses Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology in ear tags to identify specific cattle.

"RFID technology allows animals to be identified and traced, which is important both for human and animal welfare," says Juanita Kopp, farm production extension specialist – beef with MAFRD. "It is especially important during an animal health or food safety emergency where a fast response is needed."

Through *Growing Forward 2's* Growing Assurance – Food Safety On-Farm program, livestock producers can apply for funding to adopt RFID technology, including RFID reading equipment and software as well as a carrying case and docking station. ■