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## **Livestock Welfare Issues**

WARSAW, Mo. – Recently, several news reports have discussed animal health issues that may have direct implications on the production of livestock in the future. While the impact of these stories and company announcements is yet to be determined, it is certain that livestock production agriculture is in the spotlight of the national government and media. Public scrutiny of livestock production systems is not going to go away anytime soon.

While we can all lament about the increased regulations or paperwork that ultimately will accompany final decisions from government agencies or companies, there are proactive steps producers can take to deal with some of these issues. These steps include honestly assessing how livestock are raised and handled on individual farms.

Producers must be diligent in the use of animal health products. This means proper storage, handling, and administration techniques must be followed. Directions for vaccines and antibiotics are included in the packaging. Read and follow these directions. Learn how to properly administer animal health products, including where to give injections. If relevant, follow feeding instructions to the letter. Pay strict attention to withdrawal times for all animal health products regardless of how they are administered. Beef Quality Assurance (BQA) training programs are available and becoming certified would be a good first step.

Animal handling is another topic of concern for livestock producers. Producers should make an honest assessment of how they interact with the livestock under their care. Abuse can never be tolerated. Working facilities can be updated and animal handling techniques can be learned to reduce livestock and human stress. A change of mindset might be necessary, but that can happen.

Working facilities don't have to be expensive, but there are techniques to building these that help reduce animal stress. There are many sources of plans which can be built for any size operation. Understanding a few animal behavior characteristics can go a long way in improving facilities and how animals react to those facilities. Many times, simply slowing down and not overcrowding facilities can correct a lot of problems.

All of this sounds very good and idealistic as I'm writing it at the computer and listening to a cold rain fall. It becomes more real when a mean old cow has chased you back into the pickup or up a tree after you've tried messing with her calf, or has put you over the corral fence when you've tried to get her in the squeeze chute for her annual preg exam and vaccinations. Some of that comes with the territory, but it doesn't have to be considered normal.

While the full implications of the recent FDA announcement regarding antibiotic use in livestock or the announcement by Tyson that beef producers will have to follow on-farm requirements for animal treatment are not yet known, it is clear that the landscape is changing for livestock production. Becoming BQA certified or learning about low-stress animal handling techniques are two steps producers can take to be proactive in a changing world.

If you have questions on any of these topics, contact me at the Extension Center in Warsaw at (660) 438-5012, by e-mail at [schmitze@missouri.edu](mailto:schmitze@missouri.edu), or contact your local MU Extension Center. University of Missouri is an equal opportunity / ADA institution.

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