Flu may have market impact on beef producers

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The impact of the inaccurate references to "swine flu" has been devastating to pork producers but also can have negatives for beef producers, according to Dr. Derrell S. Peele, an extension livestock marketing specialists at Oklahoma State University.

In his "Cow/Calf Corner" report yesterday, Peele said while consumers who are concerned over pork's safety may temporarily increase their beef consumption, it is more probably that all meats will be adversely affected by the H1N1 flu.

For instance, the situation could further delay economic recovery in the U.S. and worldwide, making it more difficult for some countries to import beef, pork and other protein, he said This could be especially true in Mexico, which is a critically important market for U.S. beef and pork, he said. (Mexico also is critical for U.S. turkey exports.)

Moreover, some countries could use the situation to ban imports of beef and pork, as China and Russia already have, he said.

At this point, there is no real way to anticipate how bad the flu situation will get, and the economic impact is as uncertain for beef as for pork, Peele said, adding that the situation highlights "a never-ending need" to educate consumers and make sure that policymakers "use science rather than emotion" in making policy decisions.