

2020-May-Challenges Never Cease

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Oh ! For the “olden days” of normalcy - - whatever normal is – or will ever be again in the future. Most of us are trying to navigate the waters of this pandemic event in the shallows – near the shore- line. Now – for a moment - give a bit of serious thought as to what we might recommend – or attempt to accomplish – were we in a real public leadership role. Would we recommend “Opening up” business and commerce - OR – would we favor toward continuing with the “lock-down” – side of seeming safety.

I can well understand the varying degrees of claustrophobia and cabin fever that this thing of working from home can and is creating. I must admit that most of you who read this report – have some degree of freedom to move about. Personally – Mona and I have hay to bale – cows to check on – justifiable visits to the feed store – in addition to the normal grocery store run that an urban employee or business owner might have. I feel that we are all social beings – and enjoy (or need) a certain amount of interaction with fellow workers – friends and neighbors. Church conducted by Zoom and other modern tele-communication methods is certainly not the same as fellowship with our fellow parishioners. No Church dinners – and no deep and interesting debates in a Sunday School class. We miss this horribly – but still have a slight fear of re-opening and joining our neighbors at church – or the neighborhood restaurant. We love those relationships and live for them.

Now – let us look at the challenges that this “lock down” atmosphere is putting on agriculture and food production. It is eliminating much of our agricultural work force – which means that vegetable and fruit products cannot be harvested in a timely manner. Much of these crops are being left unharvested in the field – and become a total loss. Most agricultural producers have huge investments in these crops – and extremely short profit potential. An entire year’s earnings are being lost – leaving both the agricultural producer – and the agricultural lenders in horrible financial condition.

This is just as true in the animal and poultry segment of production agriculture. Many “timing issues” come into play – when we think about our food chain the marketing of perishable goods. Think about the shelf life (tank life) of the milk that the neighborhood dairy produces. Not only do milk products have to be adequately cooled – but they must be made available to the consumer in a timely manner. Let me add that the cows must be milked again tonight -and tomorrow. Poultry has to be prepared at certain size and weight levels – or they lose value rapidly. Eggs must be not only raised – but must be kept at certain temperature levels – and must be made available to the consumer in a timely manner - OR – the product loses value – or becomes a total loss. Keep in mind that even a minimal loss in product value can prove devastating for a producer – as large numbers of our nation’s agricultural operations survive on thin profit margins.

You are reading a lot about beef – pork and lamb feed lots and processing operations. Needless to say - workers in those facilities develop the virus – just like any other segment of our society. This can either shut down the meat processing industry – or – at the very least - can lose needed production capability. Continuity of our food chain is perhaps one of the most important national security issues – particularly when dealing with a pandemic event. I once heard former

U S Congressman Kika de la Garza respond to the following question. His response - when asked how long a nuclear submarine could stay submerged – “UNTIL THEY RUN OUT OF FOOD”.

All these things impact each one of us. Those of us in rural areas – or those in the most congested urban areas are faced with basically the same food availability situation.

At times like today - I give lots of thought to the Texas Capitol staffers who live in the apartment units in down-town Austin. There are literally millions of workers in the U S who are attempting to carry out their responsibilities at home - via various tele-communication means. We love our families – but week after week of being closed-up- perhaps in a two bedroom – 37th floor condominium or apartment – while still attempting to conduct the required elements of their jobs could become a very trying experience.

This entire experience is a first for most – or all of us. Let us now change the thought process a bit. Those of us who are parents are aware of one child contracting chicken pox – or a cold – and the fact that this usually led to the entire family eventually having the ailment. I have been a livestock producer – and worked for agricultural groups and associations for a number of years. In these roles - I have witnessed the similarity on numerous occasions. When a disease outbreak gets started in a feed lot – or a poultry operation the health problem can and usually does – spread to the entire population. I only use this illustration to further stress the similarity and difficulties encountered. I feel that this can be true in any and all “congested population” instances – be it people – poultry or livestock – these outbreaks are extremely difficult to eliminate – or to even minimize.

Does it seem possible that the above comparisons are really all tied together as one and the same? I am convinced that they do. My

observation is – that – as long as the infected mingle daily with the uninfected- the infected seem to increase in number.