

BioSecurity for Your Herd

BioSecurity has become a buzz word among livestock magazines and various meetings around the country. What is it and how does it relate to you? Perhaps the term biosecurity became most prevalent upon the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in Europe in the late 1990's. It has since regained attention since terrorist acts have become of greater concern. Biosecurity is defined as the management practice that protects animals from exposure to infectious agents. Biosecurity is the act of limiting infectious agents the opportunity to infect, move or spread the disease to and within your herd. Biosecurity should address all infectious agents from the most lethal to the silent infectious agents that can go undetected for months or even years.

Factors of biosecurity include sound vaccination protocols, sanitation equipment, pasture/pen maintenance, a sound protocol for handling infected animals found on the premises to minimize spread of infection and a strategy to minimize introduction of new infectious agents by outside vectors; human, animal or otherwise. Biosecurity practices should be implemented in all livestock herds from poultry to cattle.

Probably the most common form of transmission of infectious diseases into a herd or group of animals is by introduction of a new animal. Animals that have been purchased by off farm supply should be vaccinated for the area's most common forms of disease prior to the purchase when appropriate or very shortly after arrival to the farm. The new animals should be quarantined from the resident herd for a period of 2 or more weeks. The animals should not be in adjoining pastures or pens and rotation of animals should not include areas previously occupied by the resident herd or the introduced animal during the quarantine period. This example includes the arrival of newly purchased bulls, pairs, baby chicks and replacement heifers, ewes or sows. There are some diseases that the quarantine period will not sufficiently stop spread of the disease into the herd. Such diseases for cattle may include Joahnne's, BVD via BVD Persistently Infected animals, trichomoniasis, and leptosporidium. Laboratory testing of tissues or secretions are required to be absolutely sure the new animal is not a carrier. In regards to poultry, exposure to wild birds and waterfowl should be minimized. Keep free ranging poultry away from streams, ponds and rivers that are commonly occupied by wild species.

Diseased animals should be handled carefully to minimize infection to other animals and humans. Diseased animals should be separated from the herd and held in an area that does not adjoin the pasture or pens of healthy animals. Medical equipment including thermometers and needles should either be discarded after treatment or disinfected after use. Feeding/tagging equipment likewise should be thoroughly cleaned. Be careful to clean all manure from your hands, clothing and boots before exposing yourself to healthy animals or uninfected areas (including your neighbor's yard). If you are doctoring in a pasture with ill animals, be aware that the vehicle/ATV may have contaminated manure on the tires. Wash your hands after doctoring to minimize the risk of catching or spreading a disease. Confined pens should be cleaned of all manure and bedding material after exposure to an ill animal. Keep the discarded material out of reach from healthy animals. Wash the pens or disinfect the pens if feasible.

Illness and disease is very costly to any operation. Death and loss of performance can rob the little profit that there is to gain from raising livestock. In many cases, illness on the farm will affect every segment of the industry from reproduction to feed conversion. The best defense against infectious disease is prevention. Work with your local veterinarian to design a vaccination protocol that suits your ranch.

BVD is a huge problem in the cattle industry. It costs the industry billions of dollars each year in loss of performance and in reproductive failures on the ranch. It is a disease that begins on the ranch and can be hard to detect due to lack of outward or clinical signs. Many ranches in the US are unaware of the existence of it in the herd. There is great interest in the feedlot industry to identify BVD-PI free cattle. If you are interested in testing your herd or the establishment of a statewide program please contact Barbi Riggs at the Crook County Extension Office 541-447-6228.

Barbi Riggs