

As livestock producers, we spend a great deal of time focused on nutrition, genetics, reproduction, and grassland/forage management. However, one area that is sometimes overlooked until problems arise is biosecurity. To be brief, biosecurity refers to specific management practices designed to prevent disease from entering or spreading within a livestock operation.

Recent discussions surrounding avian influenza, foreign animal disease preparedness, and increasing animal movement during spring and summer have made biosecurity an especially timely topic for livestock producers of all sizes. While large commercial operations often have strict protocols in place, biosecurity is equally important for small farms, youth livestock projects, and cow-calf operations. The good news is that effective biosecurity does not always require expensive equipment or complicated systems. In many cases, small management changes can significantly reduce disease risk.

One of the most important practices is controlling the introduction of animals. Purchased animals, returning show animals, or even borrowed breeding stock can unknowingly bring disease onto a farm. Isolating new arrivals for a period of time before mixing them with the resident herd allows producers to monitor for signs of illness and reduce the risk of exposure. During this isolation period, producers should watch for symptoms such as coughing, nasal discharge, diarrhea, fever, or poor appetite.

Vehicle and equipment traffic can also contribute to disease transmission. Livestock trailers, feed delivery trucks, manure spreaders, and shared handling equipment may all carry pathogens from one location to another. Cleaning and disinfecting trailers and equipment between uses can help reduce this risk. Even simple practices such as removing visible manure and organic debris before disinfecting can greatly improve effectiveness.

Visitors are another potential source of disease introduction. Veterinarians, livestock haulers, neighbors, and other producers may unintentionally carry disease organisms on boots, clothing, or equipment. Providing a designated parking area away from livestock pens, encouraging clean footwear or washing boots, and limiting unnecessary traffic through animal areas are simple ways to strengthen farm biosecurity.

As the county fair and livestock show season approaches, biosecurity becomes even more important. Fairs bring animals from many different locations into close contact, creating opportunities for disease spread. Producers should ensure livestock are up to date on recommended vaccinations before attending events and monitor animals closely after returning home. If your animal is sick as you approach show day or fair week, consider leaving that animal at home to prevent other animals from being exposed. Avoiding shared water buckets, feed pans, and grooming equipment can also help reduce transmission risks.

Wildlife and pests should not be overlooked either. Rodents, birds, ticks, flies, and feral animals can spread disease between farms and livestock groups. Maintaining clean feed storage areas,

Biosecurity Starts at the Gate

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controlling standing water, and implementing pest management practices can help minimize these risks.

Perhaps the most important point about biosecurity is that prevention is far less costly than treatment. Disease outbreaks can result in lost performance, reduced reproductive success, treatment expenses, and even death loss. A few preventative steps today may save producers substantial time and expense later. Biosecurity plans do not need to be complicated to be effective. The key is consistency and awareness. Evaluating everyday practices and identifying areas where disease could enter the operation are strong first steps for any producer.

For additional information on livestock biosecurity practices, feel free to reach out to Hunter Nickell, Livestock Production Agent, at any Southwind Extension District Office or by email at nickell99@ksu.edu.