

APPLIED BIOSECURITY

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Many beef cattle producers fail to utilize basic biosecurity measures and thus put their operation at risk. Biosecurity is a series of good management practices that can help keep a livestock producer in business, while the lack of biosecurity may cost him/her the business.

Basic biosecurity starts with protection of the existing herd. Vaccination of the existing herd against such commonly-encountered diseases as blackleg, vibrio, leptospirosis, IBR, BVD, BRSV, PI₃, etc., is the cornerstone of any biosecurity program. Depending upon your location, and diseases that are common to your area, other diseases may need to be included in your vaccination program. Check with your veterinarian for his/her recommendations.

Protection of the existing herd includes purchasing replacements from herds with known histories, which include the lack of key disease problems and an active disease prevention/management program. Don't hesitate to ask if the purchase source herd has experienced such problems as Trichomoniasis, Vibriosis, Leptospirosis, BVD, Johnes disease, or bovine leukosis. You could easily purchase healthy-looking carriers of any of these diseases and contaminate your existing herd. Don't let the purchase source become the exposure source.

Once "clean" animals are purchased, make sure that the trucks or trailers used to transport these animals to your location are clean. Has the truck/trailer been used to haul high-risk feeder calves from an auction market to a stocker operator or feedlot immediately prior to loading your cattle? Has it been used to haul chronic poor-doing animals from a farm/ranch/feedyard to an auction market? Has it been used to haul a sick calf to the veterinarian for treatment, or a dead calf for a necropsy? Trucks or trailers should be cleaned and disinfected if they have been used to haul anything other than normal, healthy cattle prior to hauling "clean" animals. Don't let the transportation source become the exposure source.

Quarantine new herd additions for 45 days. Quarantine facilities should not allow fence line contact with the existing herd. This 45-day period will allow many incubating illnesses time to manifest themselves before new cattle are mixed with existing cattle. It will allow time to test for key diseases such as BVD, Johnes and bovine leukosis, and get the results back from the lab. It will also allow time to vaccinate the new animals in the same manner that the existing herd is vaccinated, and give vaccinated animals time to respond to the vaccine before being exposed to the existing herd.

Control access of people into your operation. If they have visited another cattle operation prior to coming to yours, they may bring disease from that operation to yours. Asking where they have been prior to coming onto your operation is a starting point. Ask your veterinarian what he has done earlier in the day, and don't hesitate to ask him to scrub his boots with disinfectant or put on clean coveralls prior to working with your animals; likewise with any other visitors. Don't let visitors become the exposure source.

Control vehicle access into your operation. Good gates and padlocks are a cheap form of biosecurity! Rendering trucks, feed trucks, and any other vehicles that travel from farm-to-farm may bring disease onto your operation. Develop a “traffic flow pattern” to limit access of outside vehicles to restricted areas on your operation. Designate a “visitors” parking area. Rather than allowing a rendering truck to drive to a dead animal, pull any dead animal to a pre-determined spot that is out of the normal traffic flow pattern. Don’t let outside vehicles become the exposure source.

Control across the fence contact. We’ve all heard the old saying, “good fences make good neighbors.” If your neighbor is constantly bringing in new cattle from a variety of sources or backgrounds, or if your property butts up against a well-traveled road, establishing a “buffer zone” between your operation and the neighbor or road will reduce the likelihood that your herd will be exposed to something from across the fence. Building a secondary fence 25-100 feet inside the perimeter fence in areas of potential exposure will provide a buffer that many pathogens will not be able to cross. Don’t let your single 5-wire fence become an exposure source.

Maintain a separate sick pen area for sick animals from your herd. This will reduce exposure within your own herd. Sick pens should not allow fence line contact with the existing herd. Always treat sick cattle after you have completed working with healthy cattle – not vice versa. Don’t you become the exposure source.

Biosecurity is not paranoia, but it does require a new way of thinking. It is thinking defensively. It is thinking preventatively. It is becoming more proactive in keeping disease out of your operation. It is a good habit to develop that could save your economic future!