

Common Sense Biosecurity Practices for Livestock Producers

At 1,200 pounds, cattle look tough...but these animals, just like horses, sheep, goats, poultry and other livestock can be “taken down” by just a few unseen bacteria, viruses or parasites, whether they’re introduced intentionally or accidentally. By making some simple changes, however, producers can ensure that their animals are afforded an extra measure of health protection!

Biosecurity practices don’t have to be cumbersome, confusing or expensive. In fact, a small tub, a gallon of bleach or disinfectant, and a brush will go a long way toward protecting livestock from “outside” disease. Premises needs to be a “safe” area and biosecurity practices are the barriers producers can use to keep disease out! The following is from the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) and would be applicable to Tennessee producers.

1. Give “germs” the boot!

You wouldn’t think of eating off the floor at the local coffee shop, livestock market...feed store or grocery. But, if you walk around these places in your work boots, then head home and work with your animals, you may be tracking “germs” on the soles of your shoes to your pasture, animal bedding or any livestock feed you step in.

Don’t take unwanted “guests” to your animals. Either keep a pair of boots or shoes to wear only on your own premise, or clean and disinfect your footwear before heading out to check on livestock.

Commercial disinfectants are readily available, or you can mix three parts bleach to two parts water in a small, flat tub. A quick scrub of your boots with a long-handled brush will remove manure, mud or debris, and the bleach or disinfectant will kill viruses, germs and parasites.

Company coming? Ask your visitors and employees to clean their boots, too. If you entertain prospective international buyers, you might even consider providing them with rubber boots that are never removed from your premise.

Where have your hands been? Handling animals at the livestock market? In Great Britain, foot-and-mouth virus was spread at the livestock auction by buyers inspecting the mouths of hundreds of sheep.

2. Don't haul home disease

Car, truck or trailer tires can harbor “germs,” too. At the livestock market, you’ve probably driven through manure, mud or muck. Taking a few minutes to spray disinfectant over your tires can kill the “germs” you’ve picked up in the parking lots, on dirt roads or in a friend’s pasture. If you’ve been hauling livestock in your trailer, a quick trip through the car wash is advisable before returning home.

3. Bucket brigades & tool trades

Borrowing equipment or tools from a neighbor? Carrying buckets, shovels or wheelbarrows to use at the local fair or exhibit? You can bet you’ve picked up “germs” at the event. Don’t bring these items home until you’ve washed off the “crud” and sprayed the equipment with disinfectant.

Clean and disinfect borrowed items before returning them!

4. Trash & Garbage: “Bag it!”

Control refuse on your premise. Don’t haul home trash or garbage from your office, store or another site, unless it’s bagged in plastic and sealed.

Never bring home meat scraps to feed livestock. Besides being illegal to feed pigs meat scraps, it’s also a dangerous practice, as viruses and bacteria can be alive in undercooked meat

scraps.

5. Tourist OR terrorist?

Be aware of who is on your property! Strangers lurking near your fence line, could be innocent tourists admiring the scenery and your stock...or they could have sinister intentions. Ask questions --or call the local law enforcement officials. These days, it pays to be alert -- and justifiably suspicious!

Friends, family or business associates coming to visit? If they've traveled internationally within the previous week, discourage them from handling your livestock. At the very least, make certain their footwear is disinfected. Some viruses can stay alive for several days on clothing and footwear.

If you've traveled internationally, wash your clothes, shower and clean your boots before going out to check on livestock or poultry. Better yet, avoid getting near your animals for at least 48 hours after traveling internationally, to ensure you don't pass any viruses that may be 'harbored' in your nasal passages.

6. Padlock your perimeter.

Lock your gates! Keep feed sacks and veterinary supplies in a secure location. Don't tempt someone to tamper with feed, supplements or medicines.

7. Taking animals to a show or fair?

Don't take chances with feed supplies and equipment at the show grounds. With the increased threat of agricultural terrorism, security is extremely important, particularly where unknown persons have access to livestock or poultry.

8. Give 'germs' space!

Keep newly introduced animals isolated for at least two weeks.

Newly acquired animals should be isolated for at least two weeks, to ensure you don't introduce disease to your main herd or flock. Although it's not required, unless you import animals from out of state, you might consider having your private practitioner inspect animals prior to, or shortly after, making a purchase.

As an added precaution, consider keeping show animals segregated for two weeks after they've been to a fair or exhibit. If someone has introduced a disease at an event, you'll be protecting your main herd or flock.

8. Report signs of disease immediately!

Don't wait to report unusual signs of disease to your private practitioner.

Early reporting is crucial to the health and safety of YOUR herd or flock and to the entire livestock and poultry industry!

Why be Concerned?

* A foreign animal disease outbreak could stop Tennessee's interstate and international livestock and poultry trade "dead in its tracks."

* Early reporting is the most important step in eradicating a disease outbreak! Don't be afraid of crying "wolf!"

* Don't take shortcuts! Livestock health regulations were developed to protect herds and flocks!

Signs of disease that should be reported immediately:

1. Sudden, unexplained death loss in the herd or flock

2. Severe illness affecting a high percentage of animals

3. Blisters around an animal's mouth, nose, teats or hooves.

4. Unusual ticks or maggots.

5. Staggering, falling or central nervous system disorders that prevent animals from rising or walking normally.

Source: Everett, Carla, 2003, Biosecurity...Plain and Simple.
Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC), 11/22/03.