

Tips for Practical Farm Biosecurity

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With the current price of cattle, it is wise to do everything possible to protect your investment. The best vaccines and medication can be overcome by poor management every time, so simple down to earth basic biosecurity can be applied to farms without costing a fortune. This will help to prevent the spread of disease farm to farm and within your farm.

Have a boot-cleaning kit

Footbaths have their place but for most operations they aren't practical, especially in freezing temperatures or muddy conditions. And dipping boots in them doesn't allow enough contact time to penetrate collected material.

The most important thing is removing mud and manure from boots. A good brush, scraper and pail of hot, soapy water can be very effective. Once cleaned, use a spray bottle to thoroughly apply a solution of household bleach as a last step.

Simple disinfectant use

There are many good disinfectants but the best option is one that is readily available and will be used. The more expensive the product, the more the tendency to skimp. Everyone has household bleach and will not be afraid to use it.

Biosecurity for guests

Have extra boots and coveralls for visitors. This can be as simple as disposable plastic boot covers and single use coveralls, so no need to manage footbaths and wash-up protocols or tell people they need to clean up. These can be removed and disposed of in a designated area while on the farm.

Disposable gloves provide protection against disease spread and even some zoonotic diseases, but if gloves are not available, wash hands as soon as possible and use alcohol based hand cleaners.

Have dedicated equipment.

There are two biosecurity goals in calving season. Don't introduce anything new, so avoid buying little calves from the auction and know where your colostrum is coming from.

Manage what's on your farm. Mark and keep colostrum feeder bags separate for healthy and sick calves. Saliva and milk fats are sticky, so clean bags with hot soapy water, rinse and disinfect with bleach solution, and then hang to dry.

Healthy animals first

Tend to healthy animals first, then treating the sick maximizes the time between when you are last in contact with those animals. Avoid returning to the healthy animals after being exposed to the sick animals unless you have properly disinfected boots, coveralls and washed hands or changed gloves.

Disinfect equipment between animals

Any instrument that can share blood/bodily fluids between animals has the potential for spreading disease. Even small amounts of blood on tagging, tattooing, calving equipment, and dehorning tools can transfer disease such as bovine leucosis and anaplasmosis. Dip equipment into a solution of bleach and water for approximately one minute between animals will help to reduce the spread of disease.

Fresh needles make sense

Use detachable needles and change to a fresh one for every animal. Changing needles takes just a few moments, and good needles cost only a few cents compared to the cost of lost production or even the loss of an animal due to disease.

Manage new addition entry

The best advice is to buy cattle with known health records and screen for disease upon entry, especially persistently infected BVD (Bovine Viral Diarrhea Virus) animals. Keep them separate from the herd until test results are back, then vaccinate and deworm based on the health protocols determined by your herd veterinarian. A typical quarantine period would be approximately one month.

If you have any questions please feel free to contact me at lstrick5@utk.edu, or 865-974-3538.