

Dollar Drain Dollar Saving Tips for Texas Dairies

August 2002

Biosecurity Can Save Dollars

Last year's bombing of the World Trade Center and the outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease have resulted in the recommendation to improve biosecurity on America's farms. The typical question that arises with biosecurity is "How much does it cost?"

The cost for implementing biosecurity changes in general is very low because it often requires only a change in management and commitment to those changes. Seldom are large capital investments required, but everyone working on the farm must be involved.

Biosecurity includes the management practices that:

- Protect the herd from disease entry,
- Minimize the spread or adverse effects of existing diseases, and
- Reduce the risk for antibiotic risk for illegal residues in milk and meat.

Key elements of a biosecurity plan include:

1. Taking control of how diseases enter and spread in a herd, which requires managing cattle, manure, pests, pets, wildlife, people, water and feed.
2. Purchasing replacements from a single source that can provide a known health history.
3. Developing a comprehensive vaccination program for purchased and home raised animals.
4. Isolating new arrivals upon arrival at the farm.
5. Transporting purchases in clean trucks, while minimizing the stress of transportation.
6. Controlling other species, i.e., cats, dogs, birds, rodents, and wildlife to reduce contact with the herd.
7. Managing manure to prevent contamination of young stock and feed.

Preventing feed from becoming contaminated with disease pathogens or manure is critical to the success of a biosecurity program. Keep rodents and birds out of feed storage area. Clean delivery trucks between trips and limit the access of drivers to other areas of the facilities. Control the access of pets and pests to minimize wastage and contamination of the feed. Use separate equipment for manure handling. Balance rations to enhance productivity and immune function to reduce metabolic and infectious diseases. Visually assess whether feeds have mold and conduct routine testing for high risk toxins.

Other precautionary steps required include: Monitor where people go and insist they clean and sanitize boots and equipment. Work livestock from youngest to oldest and healthy to sick. Develop an effective vaccination program to supplement your other biosecurity measures.

Most of these practices can help your herd lead a healthier life, which minimizes the dollar drain that occurs when animals have to be treated for disease. Implement a sound biosecurity program to enhance your bottom line.

Contributing Extension Dairy Specialists:

*Ellen Jordan, Sandy Stokes and Michael Tomaszewski.
Texas Cooperative Extension, The Texas A&M University System*