

Should You Step up

Common sense and a plan are best for beef breeders.

by **Barb Baylor Anderson**, field editor



35 Keys to Success Herd Health

Beef producers just need to look at the impact porcine epidemic diarrhea virus (PEDv) has had on the U.S. pork industry to draw attention to the importance of a biosecurity plan for their herds. PEDv, which was discovered in the United States in May 2013, has spread to farms in nearly 30 states.

“PEDv opens the eyes of everyone in the U.S. livestock industry. It could happen to any of us,” says Chad Hoffman, Hoffman Angus, Colfax, Ill., who also works with Genex Cooperative. “We need to be conscious of disease and take necessary steps to prevent it before it happens.”

Hoffman says that is particularly true for producers on the show circuit. Cattle exhibitors many times also exhibit pigs, sheep or other animals. People must be aware of, and prepare for, not only cattle-to-cattle

contact, but human contact with other species in other barns.

Jeff Brooks agrees. The Prophetstown, Ill., commercial cattleman’s daughters are growing a purebred-Angus herd and are showing heifers at local, state and national events.

Have a health plan

“We move cattle on and off our farm routinely. To me, biosecurity means you need a good vaccination program before you move from farm to farm or farm to show,” he says. “Any time we buy a heifer, I do my research. I visit with the breeder, check vaccines and health status, and sometimes even have our vet talk with theirs. You want to make sure plans are compatible.”

So does Hoffman. “We have a good

working relationship with our vet so we know any new cattle coming in are properly vaccinated and our herd health records are up to date,” he says.

Brooks also raises pigs, and is aware of how catastrophic PEDv has been for some producers. “I think people are more conscious of disease issues now. Keep your guard up,” he says.

Another important element of preventing disease transmission is taking steps to prevent any potential spread. Brooks has different footwear for farm visits and shows, and he takes care to clean vehicles and wash clothes after being on another site where animals are present.

Hoffman follows a similar routine. “Require people to wear plastic boots when they come to your farm and burn the boots

Biosecurity?



PHOTO BY KASEY BROWN

► **Above:** “The primary means of introducing new diseases into a herd is via introduction of new animals. Testing imported cattle for diseases can decrease risk. At a minimum, determine when, where and what tests will be done with a consulting veterinarian,” say Andrew Allen and George Barrington.

after they leave,” he says. “I use a boot wash or disinfectant before and after each farm visit, both for my own herd and for Genex business.”

Maintaining a biosecurity program may be the cheapest, most-effective way to control disease, finds the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association (NCBA) Beef Cattle Herd Security/Bovine Viral Diarrhea (BVD) Working Group. The goal is to prevent, minimize or control cross-contamination of body fluids between animals, between animals to feedstuffs, and between animals to equipment. Biosecurity also is critical to maintaining herd health while keeping production costs low.

Washington State Extension’s Andrew Allen and George Barrington define external biosecurity as practices directed at preventing the entry of new diseases into a herd. Internal biosecurity involves practices that aid in preventing the spread of disease within a group. A basic biosecurity plan can address bringing in new animals, quarantine and communal grazing.

“The primary means of introducing new diseases into a herd is via introduction of new animals. Testing imported cattle for diseases can decrease risk. At a minimum, determine when, where and what tests will be done with a consulting veterinarian,” the pair suggests. “Biosecurity policies used in source herds

should be no less stringent than those in the buyer’s herds.”

Vaccinations

Mississippi State University veterinarian David Smith adds individual herd risk analysis may reveal that some vaccines are not always justified economically. He says factors influencing the decision should include herd size, level of risk from a specific disease and vaccination cost compared with potential costs of a disease outbreak.

“There are situations where it may not be economically advantageous to vaccinate,” he says. “The decision is unique to each operation. For some, a decision not to vaccinate may be logical.”

Vaccines cannot replace management practices in a biosecurity plan. Quarantine of incoming cattle may decrease the likelihood of introducing certain diseases into a herd. Allen and Barrington note quarantine is most effective for diseases with short incubation periods and no inapparent carrier states, such as bovine respiratory syncytial virus (BRSV), parainfluenza 3 virus (PI₃) and BVD. It is less effective for diseases with prolonged incubation periods and inapparent carrier states, like paratuberculosis, leukosis, brucellosis, leptospirosis and neosporosis.

A quarantine period of at least 60 days is recommended by the Washington State Extension specialists to allow adequate time for identifying diseases with short incubation times, performance and evaluation, and preventative measures such as deworming and vaccinations.

They say cooperative management practices can be incorporated in communal grazing situations to help control disease transmission risk. An example includes testing bulls used in communal grazing for *Tritrichomonas foetus* (trich), combined with culling of all test-positive animals.

“Make sure recipient cows also are screened,” stresses Brooks. He recommends producers be aware of whether they are purchasing in areas with dense livestock populations or unique disease concerns. “Do your research. Different farms and different states have different regulations.”

“Biosecurity is all about total herd health. Brush up on biosecurity measures and see what you can do to improve your farm and prevent problems,” says Hoffman. “Every producer will need their own level of biosecurity to do what is necessary to protect animals on their farm. Even reputable livestock herds can have issues, so protect your animals. Use common sense.”



Editor’s Note: A former National Junior Angus Board member, Barb Baylor Anderson is a freelancer from Edwardsville, Ill.