



Healthy animals – Biosecurity and the beef industry



Photograph provided by Canada Beef Inc.

Commingling

Controlling and limiting the movement of livestock is recognized as one of the most important biosecurity practices to minimize the transmission of disease pathogens. Animal movements are a risk factor that are inherent in common practices in the beef cattle industry and it is important to both recognize the risks and manage them effectively with sound biosecurity practices.

Management practices that increase the frequency of livestock contact through commingling, increase the opportunity for contact with high risk animals which is of particular importance when there are highly susceptible animals in a herd.

High risk animals are of an unknown or relatively higher risk of spreading disease (e.g. sick animals). Highly susceptible animals are at a greater risk of developing an illness (e.g. calves).

Commingling

Commingling occurs when cattle from one operation come into contact with those from another. This may happen on crown range, in community pasture, at livestock shows and at auction.

Commingling is common in the cattle industry; however, the practice may jeopardize animal health. The risk is that, when mixed together, cattle from one operation may be exposed to infectious diseases present in the animals from another operation. This provides an opportunity for disease to be spread from one group of cattle to another, particularly if the disease risks encountered are outside of the herd's existing disease management program.

While it is not practical to stop commingling, there are ways to manage and minimize the risk.

Discuss the health of the herd with other owners

Disease risks and management practises can vary between operations. Obtain and share information about commingled animals with previous and future owners. Knowing what diseases the animals may be or have been exposed to will help producers plan for and manage the risk.

Segregate, vaccinate, test and treat

New or returning animals should be held separately from the herd for a minimum of 14 days, and monitored for signs of disease. Before introducing new animals, vaccinate for disease risks relevant to the herd, and test and treat for disease risks relevant to the environment that the animals have come from.

Minimize contact with other herds and species

Contact with different herds or species may expose animals to disease risks that are not currently being managed in the herd. Minimize these interactions where possible, and take steps to manage the risk (monitoring, vaccination, etc.) where it is not.

For more information

These are just a few of the recognized biosecurity practices that producers can use to manage the disease risks on their operation. For more information on biosecurity, or to obtain a copy of the Canadian Beef Cattle On-Farm Biosecurity Standard, please visit: www.inspection.gc.ca/biosecurity.