

Dairy Herd Biosecurity

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Over the last few years dairy producers have become more aware of the need to have disease biosecurity programs for their farms. What potential diseases to be concerned about, how those diseases could be introduced onto a farm, and ways of preventing or reducing the risk of introducing those diseases have been the topics of discussion at many educational meetings and in dairy publications.

At the 41st Annual Meeting of the National Mastitis Council a dairy producer from Ontario, Canada spoke about his experiences of implementing a biosecurity program, and the practical difficulties he has faced in following such a program. For five years his dairy farm has been the host location for a genetic evaluation program of first lactation cows from across Canada and the U.S. Cows that are candidates for the program have been tested for various diseases before they are brought to the farm, and certain vaccinations had to have been given the cows. Animals that haven't passed the tests (more than 50%) are rejected and not allowed to come onto his farm. The animals that are accepted into the program are integrated into his herd and spend their first lactation there before returning to the herd they came from.

Some of the comments that the producer, Mr. Peter Schuttel, gave about his experiences are presented below.

- He stated that his biosecurity efforts have resulted in his own cattle being healthier. They now last longer in his herd and have been easier to care for.
- He believes that every producer should be randomly checking their cattle for major diseases present in their area. For him, Johne's and mastitis are the two most important diseases he checks cows for.
- He thinks producers limit the potential of their cattle by the environmental limitations they are subjected to. For example, people spend large sums of money on cattle genetics, and then place expensive embryos in recipients of unknown health status, or place expensive purchased cattle in a dirty environment, or do not provide adequate amounts of clean feed and water.
- Currently he spends about \$20 per cow per year on testing for various diseases. That figured was doubled initially with all the tests that were run. The testing expenses are a good investment he believes. The annual costs of maintaining a disease biosecurity program drop significantly when you move from eradication to monitoring.
- Major costs associated with the program have been the high cost of premature culling, and the loss of value on high genetic value animals that test positive.

He concluded his remarks by stating that the issues of food safety and antibiotic resistance will create increasing pressure on the dairy industry. He believes dairy producers need to be proactive and prevent disease by providing cattle with a sound and sustainable environment.

Every dairy producer should have a biosecurity program implemented in his operation. I urge producers to contact their veterinarian, Extension agent, or other dairy industry consultant to obtain assistance in developing a program tailored for each farm's specific needs.