

## BIO-SECURITY

All of us visiting farms need to be careful that our visits do not assist the spread of disease. However many of the printed guidelines that exist aim to be all-embracing, for instance covering precautions farmers must take in moving animals around. These notes are simpler because they concentrate on the precautions which farm visitors need to take.

Their purpose is to:-

- i. Jog our minds and ensure that we do not increase any hazards in the way we go about our work, or appear to do so.
- ii. To make it easier for us to understand processes that are being urged or enforced on the rest of the industry, for example farmers or livestock markets, vets or RPA Inspectors.

The next section is largely based on guidance notes used by the RPA. They recognize that behaviour must relate to circumstances and there are broadly three categories of circumstances:-

- a. 'Normal' times in the absence of diseases like foot and mouth disease or avian flu.
- b. General circumstances during an outbreak of such diseases.
- c. Close proximity to such diseases in or around the inner zones.

Other circumstances influence the precautions which need to be taken:-

- Has the visitor been to other farms that day or going to farms later?
- Is the visit just to the house or does it involve going near or mixing with livestock?
- Are the farm's animals likely to be yarded near the homestead or are they grazing away from the buildings?
- Will it be possible to make the journey without carrying mud in or out on a vehicle? (Remember disinfecting or washing a vehicle's wheels is one thing, doing it all over the underside is another)
- In the absence of a disease outbreak, is there a risk of jeopardizing the quality of the help you give by appearing reluctant to visit people on their home ground?

### **General Principles**

The guidelines used by the RPA begin with general points:-

- 1) Farm to farm movement of infected livestock is the most effective means by which animal diseases such as Foot and Mouth Disease can be spread. Contact with animals and with their excrement also poses significant risks. Clothes, boots, vehicles and equipment can become contaminated and can carry disease from one premises to another. Diseases can also be spread by other means, such as wildlife, air or other vectors.
- 2) Implementing biosecurity measures as standard practice helps to ensure that all those working with farm animals or coming into contact with them do not spread disease when they enter or leave premises. This is important whether or not any disease outbreaks have been reported.
- 3) Some diseases are zoonotic - they can be transmitted between humans and animals - therefore there are good public and occupational health reasons for having bio-security measures.

### **The guidelines continue with the most important biosecurity measures:-**

- 1) Methods of working should minimize the movements of people, vehicles or equipment into all areas where farm animals are kept.
- 2) If direct contact with farm animals cannot be prevented then it is best practice to cleanse and disinfect protective clothing, footwear, equipment, vehicles etc. before and after the contact with the animals, or to use disposable protective clothing.
- 3) In some premises farm animals are present for short periods of time e.g. showgrounds and markets. If these premises cannot be cleansed and disinfected then there is a legal requirement to rest them for 27 days. This rest period is critical for allowing the detection of some exotic modifiable diseases in animals that used the premises. For most disease agents it also reduces the risk to animals that subsequently use the land by allowing the infectious agent to decay naturally.

### **The people being visited**

It is of prime importance to discuss the visit in advance with those being visited and to be sure that they are comfortable with it, and then to abide by any precautions they prescribe.

### **Our Conclusion**

There are clearly situations when visits should not occur (which makes the maintenance of other means of contact critical).

The most important precaution is to arrive at a farm clean and leave it in the same state. Mud, manure, and contact with animals pose the biggest risks. Your car, clothes and boots must be **clean** when you arrive on the farm or at the market. No amount of disinfectant will kill disease in dirt. You should wash your boots with disinfectant when you arrive at the farm. You should clean muddy boots until they are spotless and disinfect them before you leave the farm. Alternatively you can use disposable clothing or clothing and boots loaned by a farmer - that way the disease stays on the farm.

Car tyres and undersides are extremely difficult to clean adequately so you should always park in a dry place away from any manure or where livestock can get at your vehicle to lick it etc.

The above is in normal times -in an animal disease outbreak situation you should take advice from the place you are visiting or from professionals who know the full circumstances of the outbreak at that site.

Accompanying this is a reminder checklist that you may wish to keep in your car.