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A simple management exercise

To many people, biosecurity is a complex and often daunting subject, but it need not be. This simple management exercise will help you to get a comprehensive overview of all the possible routes by which disease could come on to a farm. Biosecurity can be defined as managing or controlling these.

Your farm probably has a perimeter fence. If it does not, give it an imaginary one for use in this management exercise.

Start by listing everything which crosses this boundary to enter the site. This is best done as a group exercise involving some of the people associated with the farm. When you have compiled your list put it away and then, in a few days' time, revisit it and invariably you will add to your list! Then ask others to check your list to see if you have overlooked anything – if you have, add it!

Very simplistically, we are going to list everything that enters the site by underground, surface and airborne routes. Our list will include things like water, feed, people, mobile phones, vaccines, equipment, bedding material, dust, mice, insects, wild birds, staff food etc etc. Obviously your list will be much longer and some categories will need to be subdivided, for example people can be divided into farm staff, veterinarian, management, knackerman, engineers, electricians, state veterinarians etc, etc.

Once you have completed this list we can go on to the next stage and in this we ask two questions. The first is 'Does it have to come on to the farm?' If the answer is no, stop it and you have removed a risk. For example, electricians are a risk because they go from farm to farm and their tool bags invariably contain a sample of pooled debris from the farms they have visited. Why not have plug in fans which farm staff can unplug and replace. Then you can take the fan to the electrician (rather than the electrician to the fan) thereby keeping the electrician off the farm. When the fan returns you can fumigate it – you can not fumigate the electrician!

If something has to come on to the farm, we then ask the second question and that is 'What can we do to eliminate or minimise the risk of it bringing disease on to the farm?' For example, if we are bringing vaccine on to the farm why not leave the outer packaging, which has the greatest risk of being contaminated outside the farm rather than take it right through to point of use and possible pig contact?

Finally, the extent to which we control inputs will depend on the value or importance of the stock held on that farm. Thus, biosecurity for pedigree stock is greater than that for grandparents, which is greater than that for commercial breeders, which is greater than that for weaners or fatteners. Or, in other words, the biosecurity of a farm containing 5,000 sows is usually greater than that provided by a small farmer for his 50 sows.

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