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065 – Disease prevention

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Disease prevention

The scale of modern poultry production and the short life span of broilers means that today the emphasis of health management has to be focused on disease prevention, rather than disease detection and treatment.

Control strategies

Ideally, if we can keep a disease out of a country, region or just a farm this has to be the best option.

The first stage to this process is to confirm we are actually free of the disease and then do what we can to maintain that status. At a national level this may well involve legislation and controlling the importation of high risk products, such as day old chicks, hatching eggs, feeds and feed ingredients.

This often also involves monitoring programmes and eradication by slaughter if the disease is detected. If good vaccines are available, as is the case for Newcastle disease, our control programme may include compulsory vaccination.

When control is via slaughtering out, adequate time must be given for the thorough cleaning and sanitisation of the farm afterwards. There must also be a system of tracing any contacts with the infected farm to see whether the disease has spread or not. The one important thing here is that the earlier a serious disease is detected the greater the likelihood that spread has not occurred. When the foot and mouth outbreak occurred in cattle, sheep and pigs in the UK a few years ago, the farmer did not report it and so the disease ultimately spread to hundreds of farms and, in fact, the original outbreak was only detected by tracebacks to it from subsequent outbreaks.

At farm level this involves good biosecurity, which will be covered in a future Poultry**health** BYTES.

Understanding epidemiology

If we are to effectively control any disease we must understand its epidemiology and use this to our advantage.

For example, if a disease is egg transmitted we are never going to control its spread if we continue to set hatching eggs from an infected breeder flock and sell the resulting progeny unless we have a method that effectively eliminates the disease causing organism in the egg or in the resulting day old chick.

If other vectors are involved control must include their elimination. Good examples here include litter beetles that survive in the fabric of our buildings between production cycles and can harbour Gumboro disease virus, or mice which vacate a building during cleaning but return in the next cycle still carrying the Salmonella enteritidis from the earlier infected cycle.