

Compartmentalisation – a big word for common sense management

Compartmentalisation has become a bit of a buzz word in the poultry sector so in this article we will endeavour to briefly explain what compartmentalisation is and what it involves.

The OIE describes a compartment as 'one or more establishments under a common biosecurity management system containing an animal subpopulation with a distinct health status with respect to a specific disease or diseases for which required surveillance, control and biosecurity measures have been applied for the purpose of international trade'.

When this is successfully applied, situations such as when Canada had avian influenza on its west coast and the whole country could

not export livestock will not arise. In this situation, operations in the east of Canada, which were thousands of miles away from the problem, could not export stock just because they were in the same country.

Conversely, farms on the Dutch border in Germany could export even though farms just a few kilometres away in Holland had avian influenza!

Hopefully, compartmentalisation will avoid such ludicrous scenarios in the future. This is important to the breeding sector as breeding stock movements as a part of global trade have been significantly disrupted by outbreaks of avian influenza in the country of origin that had no connection whatsoever with the breeding stock that should have been exported.

In essence, under compartmentalisation, if it can be demonstrated that the livestock in the compartment is epidemiologically differentiated from other subpopulations of livestock of differing health status then product from the compartment may be exported.

For international trade, compartments must be under the direct control and responsibility of the veterinary administration in the country concerned and comply with various prerequisites.

A compartment will be defined on a basis of its biosecurity measures and functional boundaries will be defined that adequately separate it from adjacent animal populations of a different health status.

In this process consideration will also be given to its distance from sources of possible disease risk, such as slaughterhouses, rendering plants, agricultural shows, zoos, circuses and other points of animal concentration.

In assessing the biosecurity of a compartment consideration is given to things such as security fencing, facilities for people entering the compartment, vehicle access including washing and disinfection facilities, feed storage, disposal of carcasses, manure and waste and the water supply.

The integrity of a compartment relies on effective biosecurity which must be managed by an effective biosecurity plan that gives due consideration to the potential routes for possible disease introduction and their management.

Critical control points should be defined

for each route and standard operating procedures must include the implementation, maintenance and monitoring of control processes, the application of corrective actions, verification of the process and record keeping.

There should be a contingency plan in the event of a change in the level of disease exposure. Any compartment must have a valid traceability system and all livestock movements in and out of the compartment should be certified by the appropriate Veterinary Administration in the country.

Obviously the disease(s) for which the compartment has been defined should be monitored for within the compartment to confirm its on-going free status.

Appropriate surveillance

Surveillance requires an appropriate combination of active and passive surveillance and any laboratory testing that is integral to the surveillance must be undertaken in officially designated laboratory facilities and, where appropriate (for example, positive results), results should be confirmed by an OIE Reference Laboratory.

So, if we consider poultry breeders, the compartment could be the whole of a breeding company or a self-sufficient and geographically distinct cluster of farms and hatchery in the case of a large operation that wants to divide its risk into two or more compartments. If this option is followed then normally these would be stand alone compartments with no inter-compartmental movements of stock, staff, hatching eggs, equipment or feed.

It is interesting to see that major exporting countries of poultry breeding stock, such as Great Britain, are now implementing a compartmentalisation scheme to facilitate their trade with third countries.

However, it should be noted that in the EU the initial approval of compartments can only be granted when there are no restrictions in place in that country for avian influenza.

So, hopefully some sanity will return to international trade in breeding stock and the disruptions encountered in recent times will be confined to the history books! ■