

Michigan Dairy Review

... connecting research with the dairy industry



Do You Have a Visitors' Policy?

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Animal production is an integral part of our food system in the U.S. As a country we are blessed with abundant, safe food that is relatively inexpensive as compared to other countries. On the other hand, food safety and food security have become more important in the U.S. (1). As dairy producers, you are acutely aware of the contributions of animal agriculture to our society and the economy. Therefore, it is critical to continue to safeguard the livestock industry to protect the food we produce and our livelihoods.

One aspect that is becoming more important is reducing risk of disease entering livestock operations. There are numerous sources of common and foreign animal diseases and a number of potential routes that disease can enter our farm operations. Taking time now to understand routes of disease transmission and implement steps to control them will significantly reduce the chance of infectious diseases entering your operation.

A significant risk for transmission of common diseases to dairy and beef operations is through individuals and vehicles moving from one farm to another. Such diseases include Bovine Viral Diarrhea Virus (BVDV), cryptosporidium, salmonella, and Johne's disease. Further, foreign animal diseases (FAD), such as foot-and-mouth disease (FMD), can also be unintentionally carried by visitors through global travel. FMD is endemic in Asia, Africa, Middle East and parts of South America (2).

Because visitors increase the risk factor of disease, livestock producers should consider all visitors (from the vet to the city cousin) as a potential source of disease transmission into their farm and take steps to reduce this risk. A starting place is to develop and implement a visitors' policy that is clearly communicated to visitors and staff and enforced by all involved.

Visitor Policy: The health and welfare of our cattle and the safety of the product they produce is of highest priority to us. To help protect our cattle and you, we have developed a visitor policy. Please follow these guidelines.

- Visitor hours are 8 AM to 5 PM.
- Do not proceed into facilities if you have been in another country in the past 7 days
- Wear clean clothes. If you are coming from another farm, we ask that you do not come in contact with our animals if your clothes are soiled
- Wear plastic boots or clean and sanitize personal boots
- Sign our visitors log (over time this will help quantify a farm's risk from visitors if it contains who and where they have been prior to visiting, e.g. other farms, other countries)
- Enter facilities at designated points
- Please avoid areas marked "Employees Only" or "Disease Prevention Area" (such as our calf housing)
- Dispose of plastic boots or clean and disinfect personal boots prior to departure
- Wash hands prior to departure and after disposing of plastic boots or sanitizing boots
- Enjoy your visit - Thank you

A Visitors' Policy

Establishing a visitors' policy for all visitors including vendor reps, veterinarians, and consultants, can reduce your risk from this route of disease transmission. A visitors' policy states guidelines that visitors must follow when visiting your operation. Here's an example:

Visitors Are Welcome

The wording of a visitors' policy and signs for visitors set the tone for all who visit your operation and may impact attitude and compliance. It is important to communicate expectations and at the same time make people feel they are welcome. In Michigan, a number of dairy and livestock farms provide tours for the public. So there is a need to balance the openness of your facilities with appropriate and responsible biosecurity measures to reduce risks.

Always keep in mind that we cannot eliminate all risk and that risk will increase with the number of visitors and their connection with other farms and recent global travel.

In today's social and economic climate there is great value in having the public visit our farms. This is probably one of the best ways to reintroduce many consumers to their agriculture roots and reconnect them with the food system.

A farm visit can increase their awareness of food production. At the same time, a good visitors' policy reminds your visitors that you deeply care about the health and welfare of your animals. And they can better appreciate your hard work to generate high quality food products.

The visitor policy also can assist you over time to quantify your farm's risk. For example, the visitor sign-in log can let you know more about your visitors, especially if it contains information such as who and where they have been prior to stopping by your farm. You may determine that you need to ask some individuals to limit their contact with your livestock to reduce risks.

Note: A visitors' policy is one of the farm gate biosecurity protocols incorporated in the Biosecurity STOP Sign Campaign that involves producers working with MSUE, animal industries and MDA to demonstrate a set of farm gate biosecurity measures.

References:

1. Bitsch, V, K. Lee, D. Ross, T. Ferris, M. McFadden. 2008. Dairy Farmers' Priorities - 2008 Michigan Dairy Industry Survey. Michigan Dairy Review. October.
2. http://www.oie.int/eng/info/en_fmd.htm Office country disease status. World Organization for Animal Health website.