

AG Strategies

Agriculture Business Strategies

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Biosecurity Considerations for Ag Tourism Ventures

The purpose of this factsheet series is to help producers and processors understand the key elements needed to manage a business. The factsheets also discuss some of the essential components used to develop a business plan and assess the profitability of a business venture.

Alberta Agriculture, Food and Rural Development (AAFRD) supports rural diversification. This includes supporting farms, ranches and acreages offering non-traditional ag tourism pursuits.

The occupants and owners of these enterprises may be third-generation landowners or emerging agriculture entrepreneurs. They may be involved in activities ranging from operating a fruit farm business to offering horseback riding holidays for guests.

No matter what the situation, biosecurity precautions are a part of the common sense agricultural production management practices followed by ag tourism operators.

Ag tourism guests are primarily from urban locations. They are classified as “low-risk visitors” as they reside in towns and cities and for the most part do not have contact with livestock and poultry. They bring almost no risk of disease introduction, even if few precautions are taken. However, it is common courtesy to greet each guest and to:

- make them aware of the operation’s biosecurity program
- enquire about their proximity to livestock and poultry in the past two weeks

Often these concerns can be easily satisfied as part of the initial guest contact assessment.

What is biosecurity?

The term “biosecurity” refers to those precautions taken to reduce the risk of introducing livestock or poultry diseases to a farm or region where they do not already exist. Examples of common biosecurity practices include:

- quarantining new stock
- controlling rodents
- cleaning footwear
- changing coveralls

A complete farm biosecurity program will cover:

- incoming stock
- vaccinations
- feedstuffs
- water
- pets
- pest control (birds, rodents, wildlife, insects, etc.)
- farm visitors



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Why is biosecurity important?

Biosecurity can:

- Prevent the introduction of diseases from other countries, such as foot-and-mouth disease. These foreign diseases can spread quickly, resulting in the loss of export markets. They can also have severe economic consequences for the entire livestock industry.
- Prevent the spread of certain diseases already found in Alberta, such as transmissible gastroenteritis in pigs or Johne's disease in cattle. These diseases can have a significant financial impact on a farm operation and visitors could potentially be held liable if proven to be the cause of an outbreak.
- Protect the operator and his/her family from diseases found in animals that are transmissible to humans, such as salmonella, E. coli 0157:H7 and campylobacter.
- Be an indicator of the operation's commitment to the health of the livestock and poultry industry, as well as to its visitors.

How are livestock and poultry diseases spread?

Some diseases require direct contact between infected and healthy animals, while others can be easily carried on boots or clothing contaminated by infected manure or other bodily discharges. Farm visitors can carry some diseases more easily than others, and there are diseases that cannot be transmitted by farm visitors at all.

Humans can spread some diseases by carrying the infectious organism in their respiratory tract. Infected humans can also give certain diseases, such as salmonella, to livestock.

Who should practice biosecurity?

Biosecurity should be practiced by anyone who:

- owns livestock
- works with livestock
- visits farms, abattoirs or premises where livestock, poultry or their products are handled, including farms with livestock or poultry of any kind, stockyards, auction markets and livestock shows

What is the risk of farm visitors bringing in disease?

Infected stock carries the highest risk of introducing a livestock or poultry disease into an operation. Farm visitors generally represent a lower risk. However, visitors have been known to carry in certain disease-causing organisms on soiled footwear, clothing or equipment, including those that cause salmonellosis, transmissible gastroenteritis and foot-and-mouth disease.

Farm visitors can be classified by the risk they represent:

- Low-risk visitors come from urban areas and do not contact livestock. They present almost no risk of introducing disease, even if few precautions are taken.
- Moderate-risk visitors are those that travel from farm-to-farm, but do not directly contact livestock or manure.
- High-risk visitors are those that travel from farm-to-farm and work directly with livestock or manure. These people contact the bodily fluids or manure of animals, and must be the most diligent with their biosecurity practices.

The following are suggested practices for ag tourism operators in a biosecurity program.

For visitors

- Establish a visitor tour to prevent random access to an operation.
- Greet every visitor. Find out where they have been in the past two weeks. Ensure foreign visitors have taken the appropriate precautions not to carry disease agents, especially those from countries with foot-and-mouth disease. Keep accurate and current records of these visits. Provide plastic disposable booties as cover for visitors' footwear.
- Provide footbaths with disinfectant and a clean-up area for all visitors.
- Provide hand-washing facilities including sanitized towelettes and dispenser pumps with waterless disinfectant.
- Remove all food and food packaging material from any location that animals might use, including footpaths.
- Educate all visitors about the biosecurity plan.
- Enforce the biosecurity plan.

For vehicles

- Establish a traffic pattern to prevent random access to the operation and to avoid contact with manure.
- If applicable, provide facilities for washing and disinfecting tires, mud flaps, etc.

For animals

- Isolate sick animals and disinfect any equipment they have been in contact with.

For feed and water

- Feed and water sources should not be accessible to visitors.

Will all premises have the same biosecurity requirements?

There can be no single biosecurity plan to meet the needs of all farms or agricultural businesses. The diseases and potential risks vary between livestock species, and also depend on the activities occurring on the premises. For example:

- a pig barn may have stricter requirements than a bison operation
- a purebred breeder may have higher standards than a feedlot

Each business must assess the potential risks and develop a flexible and practical biosecurity plan tailored to its circumstances.

For more information on biosecurity contact:

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For more information on ag tourism development go to: www.agtourism.ca or contact a new venture specialist at the Ag-Info Centre at 1-866-882-7677.