

AGRI-FACTS

Practical Information for Alberta's Agriculture Industry

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Biosecurity Considerations for Ag Tourism Ventures

Alberta Agriculture and Forestry supports rural diversification. This work includes supporting farms, ranches and acreages offering non-traditional ag tourism pursuits, which are activities that bring visitors to the location.

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

Why the concern?

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

These biosecurity precautions are necessary because guests who are welcome to an operation may not be aware that they might also bring in unwelcome visitors such as livestock or poultry pests and diseases.

Ag tourism guests are primarily from urban locations. They are classified as “low-risk visitors” since they live in towns and cities and, for the most part, are not in contact with livestock and poultry. As such, they carry a low risk of disease introduction.

However, even when few precautions are taken, it is common courtesy to greet each guest and do the following:

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

These initial biosecurity concerns can often be easily satisfied as part of the initial guest contact assessment.

What is biosecurity?

The term “biosecurity” refers to those precautions taken to 1) reduce the risk of introducing livestock or poultry diseases to a farm or region and 2) reduce the risk of spreading diseases within and outside the farm or region.

Here are some examples of common biosecurity practices:

- quarantining new and returning stock
- controlling rodents
- cleaning footwear
- washing hands, tools and equipment
- changing coveralls

Biosecurity measures can reduce the risk of introducing or spreading livestock and poultry diseases

A complete farm biosecurity program will cover a number of variables:

- incoming stock
- vaccinations
- animal movements
- water quality
- farm visitors
- pest control (birds, rodents, wildlife, insects, etc.)

Why is biosecurity important?

Biosecurity is important because an effective program can achieve the following:

- 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 effect on a farm operation, and visitors could potentially be held liable if they are 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 (zoonotic diseases), such as *Salmonellas*, *E. coli* 0157:H7 and *Campylobacter*.
- Be an indicator of the operation's commitment to the health of the livestock and poultry industries 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 hands, boots or clothing contaminated by infected manure or other bodily discharges.

Some disease agents can be easily carried by farm visitors, and other disease agents cannot be transmitted by farm visitors at all. Humans can pass some diseases to livestock by carrying the infectious organism in their respiratory tract (for example, influenza viruses) or in their gastrointestinal tract (for example, *Salmonella* bacteria).

Who should practice biosecurity?

Biosecurity should be practiced by anyone who does the following:

- 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

Any operation that meets the above conditions should develop and enforce a biosecurity plan.

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. Urban 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 Johne's disease.

Farm visitors can be classified by the risk level they represent:

- Low-risk visitors come from urban areas and do not come in contact with livestock.
- Moderate-risk visitors are those who travel from farm-to-farm, but do not come directly in contact with livestock or manure, for example, feed delivery personnel.
- High-risk visitors are those who travel from farm-to-farm and work directly with livestock or manure. These people come in contact with the bodily fluids or manure of animals, and they must be the most diligent with their biosecurity practices, for example, veterinarians.

Here are suggested practices for ag tourism operators for their biosecurity program.

For visitors

- Establish a visitor tour route to prevent random access to an operation.
- Greet every visitor. Find out where they have been in the past two weeks. Ensure foreign visitors (especially those from countries with foot-and-mouth disease) have taken the appropriate precautions not to introduce disease agents. Keep accurate and current records of these visits.

- Provide plastic disposable booties as covers for visitors' footwear or provide a station where visitors can clean up their footwear.
- Provide hand-washing facilities including sanitized towelettes and dispenser pumps with waterless disinfectant.
- Prohibit the consumption of food and drink in all locations where animals might be present, 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.
- Designate a parking area for visitors.
- 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.
- Prevent visitors from touching susceptible animals (that is, newborns).

For feed and water

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

Will all premises have the same biosecurity requirements?

No single biosecurity plan can 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 will have stricter requirements than a bison operation
- a purebred cattle breeder may have higher standards than a feedlot

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

More information on biosecurity, contact:

Alberta Agriculture and Forestry
 Office of the Chief Provincial Veterinarian
 Call 780-427-3448 or
 Toll-free via 310-FARM (310-3276)
[http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/\\$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/cpv10708_](http://www1.agric.gov.ab.ca/$department/deptdocs.nsf/all/cpv10708_)

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