BIOSECURITY

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Biosecurity is a term that is foreign to many Shepherds, however among the poultry and swine industry it is common language. Biosecurity is the effort and barriers that are put in place to prevent disease introduction into herds or flocks. So why is it important to that average sheep farmer? Ask anyone who has introduced soremouth, footrot or Chlamydia abortions into their flock or consider the recent outbreak of Foot and Mouth Disease in the U.K. Often Shepherds don't consider Biosecurity until it is too late.

Every flock no matter how large or small should have a biosecurity plan. The first step is to determine which diseases are already present on your farm and which diseases are not. Below is a list of contagious disease that you should consider.

- Chlamydia (abortions and polyarthritis)
- Campylobacter (Vibrio)
- Footrot
- Soremouth
- Johne's
- Scrapie
- Casseous Lymphadentis
- Bluetongue
- Club Lamb Fungus

Next consider which diseases would be the most devastating to introduce into your flock. This may require some time and energy but it will be well spent. For example, if you live in a wet climate footrot can be more serious than if you live in a dry region. If you have and intensive operation abortion diseases are probably more serious than if you have your ewes on extensive pastures. If you sell show wethers Club Lamb Fungus can have marked impact but is not a concern in a commercial flock. Scrapie is a greater threat if you are selling breeding stock than if you are a commercial producer.
After you have made and ranked your dreaded disease list consider methods of introduction into your flock. Certainly, flock additions can bring all of these diseases into your flock but some diseases such as

footrot and soremouth can be brought home from shows and in the case of footrot simply by a contaminated trailer.

Identify the areas that will cause the most risk to disease introduction and develop a plan to minimize the risk. An example may be to reduce the chance of bringing in footrot you will:

1. Dip all of the feet of new introductions in dilute formaldehyde on arrival to you farm.
2. Require clean overshoes on all visitors to your farm.
3. Quarantine all new sheep for three weeks when they arrive on your farm.

Another example of a biosecurity plan to minimize risk of club lamb fungus may include:

1. Disinfecting and quarantine all sheep after returning from a show.
2. Disinfecting all grooming supplies.
3. Minimizing the number of shows that you attend.

The flock biosecurity plan does not have to be elaborate and should be farm specific. It can be as simple as requiring clean overshoes or require visitors to walk through a foot bath or it can be as elaborate as not allowing visitor or new sheep onto your farm. You know the diseases that are present on your farm and the ones that are not present. You are the person that will receive economic benefit by keeping certain diseases off your farm and you are the person that will have increased expenses, time and labor dealing with introduction of these diseases into your flock.

Biosecurity plans do occasionally fail. When we see failures it is often because
1) the risks of disease and prevention measures were not adequately thought out beforehand
2) shortcuts were taken or the plan was ignored.

For example, a shepherd decided that today he/she is just to busy to dip the feet and that new ram that you just picked up and besides, you didn't notice any footrot on the farm. It is situations like these that cause good plans to fail. Take some time in developing your biosecurity plan, put it in writing and stick to it.