

What's Mine is Yours – Perspectives on Biosecurity for Canadian Dairy Farms

David F. Kelton, DVM, PhD

Department of Population Medicine, Ontario Veterinary College, University of Guelph,
Guelph, Ontario, N1G 2W1
Email: dkelton@uoguelph.ca

■ Take Home Messages

- ▶ A broad approach to biosecurity addresses the risks of incursions of foreign animal disease, between and within herd spread of endemic disease and animal to human transmission of zoonotic disease.
- ▶ Inter-industry efforts aimed at enhancing emergency preparedness and response are important and ongoing.
- ▶ Farm level targeted programs addressing economically important endemic diseases need to be established and enhanced. Perhaps the most important single element is a serious 'buyer beware' approach to animal purchases.
- ▶ Attention to the direct and indirect risk to human health will continue to grow as a focal point for agricultural sustainability.

■ Animal Health Matters

Dairy producers and the veterinarians who serve them are committed to maintaining the health and welfare of the Canadian dairy herd. In return for the privilege of marketing milk, they are bound by the provincial acts and regulations which in many instances compel them to ship milk only from healthy cows to the market. Beyond promptly treating diseased individuals, health maintenance is about minimizing the risk for disease transmission to and between individuals, and among groups.

Diseases of dairy cattle are many and can be subdivided into various groups or categories based on their etiology (agents which cause disease), pathogenesis (the mechanisms by which diseases develop, such as infectious or metabolic), epidemiology (the combination of risk factors which together cause disease events, such as environmental or contagious) or their

outcomes (morbidity, mortality or production limiting). Furthermore, diseases can manifest clinically or sub-clinically, can cross species barriers and will sometimes affect humans (zoonoses). All in all, there are many diseases of dairy cattle and many have serious impacts including direct losses attributable to treatment, production loss and/or death, and indirect losses such as market access restriction and failure to realize genetic potential. It is beyond the scope of this presentation to discuss these in detail, but the following table will serve to illustrate some of the diseases of current interest to the Canadian dairy producer.

Table 1. Major Diseases Impacting Canadian Dairy Herds

Category	Importance	Infectious Example	Non-Infectious Example
Udder Health	Milk Quality & Yield	<i>Staph aureus</i> mastitis	<i>E. coli</i> mastitis
Lameness	Welfare & Productivity	Digital Dermatitis	Claw Horn Disease
Calf Disease	Herd Replacement	Diarrhea & Pneumonia	Underfeeding
Foreign or Exotic	Trade & Survival	Foot & Mouth Disease	
Production Limiting	Milk, Meat & Calves	Johne's Disease	Sub-clinical Ketosis
Zoonosis	Consumers & Farm Family	Cryptosporidiosis	

■ Biosecurity

Biosecurity is a term used broadly in animal agriculture, but one that has many definitions. While many think of biosecurity in terms of preventing introduction of foreign animal disease or highly infectious endemic disease, there are much broader definitions that fit our agricultural systems better. Among the most encompassing definitions for biosecurity is one published by the Australian Biosecurity service; "Biosecurity is the protection of people, animals and ecological systems against disease and other biological threats" (<http://www1.abrc.org.au/pages/About.aspx>).

Based on such a broad and all-encompassing definition, biosecurity for animal production systems includes at least four distinct, but not necessarily mutually exclusive, components. It includes minimizing the risk of

- incursion of a foreign animal disease into a country (Foot & Mouth Disease)

- spread of an endemic disease among herds and regions within that country (Digital Dermatitis)
- spread of an endemic disease among individuals and management groups within a particular herd (Johne's Disease)
- transmission of zoonotic agents from animals to the people who work with the animals and/or consume their products (*E. coli* O157).

■ Perspectives on Biosecurity – Degree of Engagement

Development and implementation of biosecurity standard practices has varied across agricultural commodity groups. The poultry industries continue to lead the pack and have chosen, for very good reasons, to promote an intensive and all-perils approach. Given the structure of their industries, their management systems and the large number of exotic and endemic diseases with serious consequences for their flocks, this is clearly the best approach for that industry sector. The pork industry has chosen a more moderate and variable approach, ranging from the maintenance of highly secure high health herds, to much less secure herds with prevention programs targeted at specific pathogens and threats. The ruminant industries (cattle, sheep and goats) have taken a more basic approach and have on occasion come under fire for their apparent neglect of biosecurity. Critics point to the significant number of epidemics which have swept through Canadian dairy herds in the last 20 years, including acute BVD, digital dermatitis, neosporosis and Johne's disease. While there is no compelling argument for implementing the intensive and all-perils approach in the dairy industry, there is a need to develop best management practices that will decrease the risk of disease introduction and transmission.

■ Vigilance Against Foreign Animal Diseases

Most animal health professionals agree that while the likelihood of a foreign animal disease incursion is small, the costs associated with such an event can be incredibly high. Experience gained through observation of the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak in the United Kingdom and the Avian Influenza outbreaks in British Columbia has generated increased preparedness activity across most animal and poultry industry groups. Over the last five to ten years, we have seen the formation of strategic organizations such as the Ontario Livestock and Poultry Council for the explicit purpose of raising awareness and promoting preparation for the inevitable next foreign animal disease (FAD) outbreak. In addition to advocating for increased surveillance and laboratory capacity, inter-industry communication and disaster response plan preparation, they have been influential in organizing a series of industry-

government FAD simulations to test these activities. Attention has been focused on all aspects of emergency management, including prevention, preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery. Federal and provincial dollars have been made available to fund research and implementation of emergency prevention and response strategies. Government-industry partnerships have pursued the development of insurance products to deal with post-emergency recovery and restoration of production and trade. While we may never be fully prepared for the next FAD incursion, our level of preparedness has progressed significantly in recent years and should continue to do so in the foreseeable future.

■ **Managing the Risk of Endemic Disease on Dairy Farms**

Many producers and veterinarians will argue that the daily losses due to morbidity and mortality associated with endemic diseases such as contagious and environmental mastitis, infectious lameness and enteric diseases are of far greater concern to the dairy industry than the risk of a FAD incursion. In recent years we have witnessed the emergence and spread of several economically important 'new' diseases across the country. These include Digital Dermatitis, acute Bovine Viral Diarrhea (BVD), Neosporosis and Johne's disease, to name a few. Given the frequency with which animals move from herd to herd and province to province, the spread of these diseases from infected to susceptible herds has been rapid and complete. Herd expansion with indiscriminate accumulation of cattle from multiple sources has been a major contributor to disease spread. While the risks associated with cattle purchase have been broadly discussed, there is little evidence the dairy producers have taken a serious 'buyer beware' approach. Surveys of dairy producers in the United States and Canada indicate that a minority of cattle buyers ask about the health status of the animals they are purchasing or the herds from which they are being sourced (Faust et al., 2001; Hoe and Ruegg, 2006; Sorge et al., 2010).

Few dairy herds have followed the lead of poultry and swine producers in adopting intensive farm level biosecurity practices aimed at keeping any and all infectious diseases out of their production units. Whether the current activity aimed at the development of national farm-level biosecurity standards for the dairy sector will change that is not clear. There are opportunities to implement targeted biosecurity programs on dairy farms, aimed either at minimizing the risk of introducing specific diseases not currently present on a farm to the herd, or at decreasing the transmission of existing infectious diseases from infected to naive animals or groups on the farm. Drivers for activity in these areas include the impending reduction in the somatic cell

count (SCC) penalty level for marketed milk and the roll-out of provincial Johne's disease control programs across much of the country.

Targeted biosecurity programs are developed by dairy producers and their veterinarians through a series of steps. In most cases they include identifying diseases of concern, establishing the prevalence of the disease on that farm, limiting the movement of animals onto and within the farm, implementing disease control measures that are practical given the unique farm management, monitoring compliance with the program and annually reviewing and revising the program. One example of such a program is the Ontario Johne's Education and Management Assistance Program, established by an industry working group and funded by the dairy and beef industry partners. The program is targeted at minimizing the risk of introduction of Johne's disease by promoting an 'ask before you buy' approach, and decreasing the risk for disease transmission from infected adults to newborn calves through appropriate calving management and calf husbandry. An annual on-farm risk assessment carried out by the herd veterinarian serves to identify areas of highest risk which should be targeted for remediation. Testing of the entire herd to estimate the prevalence of disease is optional, as is the removal of adults identified as being at high risk of shedding the causal agent, *Mycobacterium avium* subspecies *paratuberculosis* (MAP). Details about the program are available on the program website: www.johnes.ca

■ **Public Health, Food Safety and Occupational Health and Safety – the often ignored elements**

The broader definitions of biosecurity include the transmission of infectious agents from animals and animal products to people. These people include farm families and employees, farm visitors and consumers of milk and meat products. Diseases of interest in this context fall into three broad categories. The first group includes pathogens which cause disease in both animals and humans, so are easily identified and are of enough importance to warrant control activities. These include Cryptosporidiosis, Rabies, Ringworm, Brucellosis and Leptospirosis. The second group includes pathogens that pose significant risk to people, but seldom if ever cause serious disease in animals, which makes them much more difficult to identify and there is less motivation to control them. These include Salmonellosis, Listeriosis, MRSA, *Clostridium difficile*, *Campylobacter* spp. and *E. coli* O157H7. The third and final group includes pathogens that cause disease in cattle, but seldom if ever are zoonotic (cause disease in people). These include MAP and Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE).

Biosecurity approaches for these risks include maintaining healthy cows in a healthy environment, practicing proper hygiene in the harvesting and storing of milk and meat, pasteurizing milk consumed on the farm, ensuring that all drinking water is potable, and washing hands frequently.

■ References

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