

Draft Health Bill pushes biosecurity up agenda

By Sarah Trickett

The idea that biosecurity levels could be linked to compensation in DEFRA's new draft Animal Health Bill reinforces the importance of hygiene and animal health, according to vet Carl Padgett.

He says those farmers who are doing their practical best to keep disease out should not be put at risk by those who are breaching biosecurity measures. And doing your practical best starts by knowing the health status of your own herd, he says.

"Particularly when trading animals, knowing the health status of your own farm is just as important as knowing the health status of the farm where you are buying from, as you could be introducing a naïve animal in to an infected herd."

And when buying in animals, don't just buy on price, stresses Mr Padgett. "Just because an animal may seem to be the right price it doesn't mean they are. Buy on health status and judge against your own farm's status."

But although the Bill doesn't specify measures, biosecurity means more than buying in animals, says Endell Vet Group's Keith Cutler.

"Biosecurity is an actual term for understanding the health status of a herd, understanding what measures can be taken to improve health status, what the threats are to animal health and how they can be minimised."

However, with no two farms the same in environment, management and endemic disease profile, the disease risk on each farm will therefore be different and so too biosecurity measures, adds Mr Cutler. "Therefore minimising risks is only possible by unique action plans for each farm."

Although not the only threat, the introduction of new animals is considered to be the greatest threat to the health status of an established herd, says Mr Cutler.

"Isolation is therefore critical when bringing any new animal in to a herd or flock. Although



Operating a strict biosecurity policy when buying animals is vital to prevent diseases entering a herd or flock.

the commonly used figure is one month to keep an animal in isolation, this shouldn't be set in stone, as some disease incubation periods, such as John's, are far longer than a month, so you have to weigh up the risks.

"But, while in quarantine, animals should not only be observed carefully to ensure no signs of infectious disease develop, it is also a good time to conduct various tests and administer prophylactic treatments to establish a health status for that animal," he says.

Mr Cutler recommends isolating animals in a separate building, although when not possible a distance of three metres should be maintained between purchased stock and animals already on farm to prevent nose-to nose contact.

The same strict three metre distant rules should also apply to livestock on neighbouring farms, says

Mr Cutler. "Where you have fields adjoining this three metre boundary fencing is important to prevent nose-to nose contact. However, fencing in this way can be expensive so having boundary fields that are not grazed at the same time will also prevent any contact."

Certain schemes can also help limit risk when buying in livestock, such as the Cattle Health Accreditation Scheme (CHACS) and the newly launched Livestock Assurance South East Region (LASER), both of which help take the myth out of infectious disease.

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For more information about improving biosecurity on farm take a look at *Farmers Weekly's* Academy on Biosecurity at www.fwi.co.uk/biosecurityacademy