Why “Buy” Disease When You Can “Borrow” It?

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Sounds silly, nobody wants to add a new disease to their herd but sometimes the obvious need for basic biosecurity gets completely left out of the picture. For example, someone recently posted the query of what was a fair price for “renting” a bull.

The only better way to spread disease than a bull moving from farm to farm would be to bring sale barn cattle home to mix with your cow herd on a regular basis. You could say the cost of “renting” a bull is “priceless” if biosecurity is not considered.

It is an unfortunate fact that if you have an established herd, most new disease problems in your farm will be disease issues that you bought and paid for. The animal then walked into your barn without proper biosecurity procedures.

This is supported by numerous research studies that show that the biggest risk factors for devastating diseases entering a farm are bringing in new animals, whether purchased or borrowed!!

This includes diseases such as Johne’s disease, BVD, hairy heel warts, Salmonella, Lepto, Mycoplasma, Staph and Strep mastitis....shall we go on? It is possible that a visitor or birds or even the milk truck moved the problem to your farm, but in reality, most disease problems walk in on four legs, ones that you paid for.

What’s the solution since not every herd can be completely isolated and sometimes animals needed to be added to the herd or returned after being shown at the fair? The solution is not reading about, talking about, or studying but actually having in place and PRACTICING basic biosecurity.

Good biosecurity is not a guarantee but can greatly decrease the chance of spending significant time and money and experiencing huge amounts of lost income to new disease issues. No one can build a perfect barrier, but like most issues, the biggest benefit is doing some of the simple and low-cost items that can provide the greatest reduction in your level of risk.

It is not important to have perfect biosecurity but it is critical to have basic biosecurity.

Biosecurity is four simple steps:

1. **Test** - Disease Screening - Staph mastitis, BVD-PI, Johne's.
2. **Isolate** - 30 feet for 30 days - A great rule of thumb is feed and handle new animals last.
3. **Sanitation** - Clean and Disinfect - before coming onto farm or when moving between older and younger groups of animals.
4. **Immunity** - Build Immunity - If sanitation is the fence, then vaccination is the guard dog.
Test, Isolate, Sanitation, and Immunity (TISI): The most important part of biosecurity is putting TISI into practice, every day and every time an animal comes on to your farm, no exceptions.

The person who was thinking of renting a bull was trying to cut costs but without taking biosecurity into consideration, putting his whole herd and livelihood at risk. Times are tough, but don’t make it worse by cutting corners.

If you would like to learn more about biosecurity practice in U.S. dairy farms, visit the National Animal Health Monitoring web site at http://nahms.aphis.usda.gov/dairy/dairy02/Dairy02An_dis_rept.pdf