

Focus groups on biosecurity on Swedish livestock farms

L. Ernholm, M. Nöremark, J. Frössling
Department of Disease control and Epidemiology, SVA

This study is supported by the
Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency



Material and Methods

As a background for a quantitative study on farmers perceptions and opinions on biosecurity, focus group interviews were held with farmers representing different categories of livestock and production types. In total, 11 farmers participated at three different meetings in three different regions. The interviews were recorded and transcribed and the transcripts qualitatively analysed for opinions expressed.

Protective Clothing for visitors

The farmers considered protective clothing to be an inexpensive and easy measure to prevent introduction of disease. Routines differ between poultry and pig farmers (higher compliance) and cattle and sheep (lower compliance) depending on buildings and production regulations.

"They think I just want to protect myself, but I might want to protect the other herds, the ones they are visiting next.."

"The most important person to put protective clothing on really is the vet, because he has undeniably been in other herds with sick animals."

"..if we take measures to protect our farm against salmonella, we keep other diseases out as well.."

"..a 'health declaration' so I don't have to question the farmer selling, when I need to buy a few heifers."

Disease control programs

The farmers expressed that there is peer pressure to participate in programs offered by authorities and animal health organizations. Many of the opinions about biosecurity, hygiene and disease control were strongly connected to the Swedish salmonella control program.

"..these strict salmonella regulations – they are for the sake of public health, not for the animal health.."

Purchase of livestock

The farmers were aware that buying livestock is a risk for introduction of infectious diseases. Some stated that buying 'tested animals' meant a very low risk, although what diseases to test for was not mentioned. Others reared their own replacements or limited the number of farms they bought animals from. To prevent sick animals from being traded, it was suggested that a written 'health declaration' should accompany animals offered for sale.

"From a biosecurity point of view, it's not that great to go to cow shows, but it's so much fun!"

Not only what they do say - but also what they do not say...

Large parts of the discussions were related to the Swedish salmonella control program. Diseases that are currently not subject to a control program were rarely mentioned. Even though the farmers mentioned several strategies to limit introduction of disease, it was clear from the discussions that they were not certain on how different diseases spread or which routes that are the highest risk for introduction. They were not fully convinced that they could prevent disease from entering their farm and in some cases they were aware of what needed to be done, but due to other reasons they chose to take the risk.