BIOSECURITY

Biosecurity refers to the management practices that are undertaken to prevent the introduction and spread of diseases. Nowadays there is a heightened awareness of biosecurity due to the risks of bioterrorism and the fear of introducing foreign diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease or new world screwworm. Biosecurity is important no matter how many animals you have. It only takes one animal to introduce a new disease and one farm to start a disease outbreak.

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT ALL FARMS HAVE A WRITTEN BIOSECURITY PLAN.

The introduction of new animals poses the single greatest risk to biosecurity on an individual sheep/goat farm. While animals may appear outwardly healthy, they could be carrying a disease. Sheep and goats share the same diseases, along with some of the same diseases that cattle, camelids, and cervids get.

It is important to buy breeding stock from reputable breeders. Be sure animals are free from footrot, soremouth, pinkeye, abscesses (CL) and other contagious diseases. The best farms to purchase from are those that have undergone testing for diseases such as CAE, OPP, CL, Johnes, and scrapie and have achieved disease-free status.

Consignment sales are another option for breeding stock. Sale animals have certified health papers. It is generally not a good idea to purchase breeding stock from an auction barn due to disease risks.

All new animals should be quarantined for at least 2 weeks, preferably 30 days, before being co-mingled with other animals on the farm or being turned out to pasture. Quarantine provides an opportunity to detect a disease problem before the rest of the flock or premises are exposed. Quarantine areas should not share the same space with the rest of the flock. Animals in quarantine should be cared for last.

The best way to keep a flock/herd healthy is to maintain a closed flock. Once maternal genetics have been established, replacement females should be selected from within the flock and new acquisitions should be limited to males. Artificial insemination, more practical in goats than sheep, can further limit the introduction of new animals to the farm.

Resistant worms are something else that can be introduced to the farm via new animals. While in quarantine, be sure to deworm new arrivals with dewormers from all three chemical classes to ensure the elimination of potentially resistant worms. While you may be managing for reduced anthelmintic resistance, the farm from whom you are buying may not be.

Some diseases can be spread by footwear, vehicles, and shearing. Be sure to protect your farm and animals from these risks. Plastic booties are a good idea for visitors.

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For more information, go to https://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/biosecurity or https://securesheepwool.org/