

Biosecurity on Swedish livestock farms – attitudes and behaviours among farmers and professional visitors

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In recent years, the National Veterinary Institute (SVA) has conducted a number of studies that deals with different aspects of on-farm biosecurity. They stem from the everyday contingency work that is performed at the institute and focus primarily on farmers, but also on other categories of professionals that handle or come into contact with livestock. Taken together, these studies contribute to our knowledge on how to act in order to improve the prevention and control of contagious diseases.

The studies show that there is a large variation in biosecurity level both among and within farms of different types. According to some farmers, they would increase their biosecurity level in case of an outbreak. However, this strategy ignores the silent first phase of disease outbreaks, and results show that outbreak information from authorities and health organisations does not reach all farmers. Focus group discussions indicate that farmers are more aware of diseases included in specific surveillance programmes, and tend to forget other endemic or emerging diseases.

Our results confirm that Swedish farmers consider their farm veterinarians their most important source of information as regards animal health and biosecurity. However, many farmers have the opinion that professional visitors, including veterinarians, need to improve their biosecurity level. Many professional visitors, on the other hand, think that on-farm biosecurity is the farmer's responsibility and that many farms provide insufficient basic means for visitors to avoid introduction or spread of infectious diseases. This is alarming since results also showed that some herds have large number of visitors.

Although most Swedish farmers believe that infectious animal diseases can and should be prevented, some are less convinced. Our results indicate that factors such as gender, education level, and age, influence how biosecurity and occurrence of disease outbreaks are perceived and best communicated.