



# THE HIDDEN PROFIT IN BEEF BIOSECURITY

Why it pays to keep disease off the farm

Biosecurity. It's a term beef producers hear a lot more of these days, but not associated with more profit.

Saskatchewan producer Les Johnston has a lifetime of experience in the beef industry. He is also a trained presenter, with many hours of experience running producer workshops across his province, some on biosecurity.

Ask cow-calf producers about biosecurity and you get familiar responses, he says. They'll tell you biosecurity is important in intensive livestock production such as poultry or pork.

They may say it's expensive or cumbersome to implement. Or they'll ask how they get paid for their efforts.

Johnston understands and respects all of those questions. His answer is essentially the same. Biosecurity is one of the simplest ways to boost the profitability of any cattle operation.

## WHAT IS BIOSECURITY?

"We are sort of spoiled in Canada because we market our wide open spaces, clean air and water and that gets ingrained in our thinking," says Johnston.

Canada's beef health status isn't something to be taken for granted. It is earned and the first step in that process is to have an understanding of what is meant by biosecurity.

"I have a layman's interpretation," he says. "Biosecurity is a process or procedure that does three things. It keeps disease or



Les Johnston of Fillmore, Sask. says producers need to think about potential disease transfer before letting visitors into cattle pens.

other health problems out of your herd. It prevents disease from cross contaminating your herd if it's introduced. And, if disease does get into your herd, it prevents infection of other herds and potentially destroying your industry."

## WHAT IT MEANS FOR PROFITS

Producers understand the role of biosecurity with major disease outbreaks such as hoof and mouth or BSE. What they don't understand is that often the things that are costing are diseases such as scours, IBR BVD, PI3 or cryptosporidia.

"Low levels of disease in your herd can

be the cause of all those little management things that drive you nuts. Scours, unthrifty calves, poor rate of gain."

Healthy cattle pay big dividends in rate of gain, feed efficiency and especially in carcass quality. A sick steer may not eat for several days and feeders tell us it may take up to 30 days for them to fully get back on track.

"We have tracked our steers through to carcass quality since the mid-'90s and we know that sick animals often won't grade as well as their healthy pen mates. That's a huge endorsement for herd health and proper vaccinations. I believe as ability to track animals increases, buyers will start looking for these healthy cattle."

## FIND THE RISK

Many producers feel if they aren't getting foreign visitors they don't need to worry. But the biggest problems come from trusted sources — cattle buyer, veterinarian, trucker, brand inspector or neighbour.

"You can walk through any high traffic livestock area or places such as community pastures where cattle come and bring back on your boots diseases such as scours or IBR BVD that could decimate your herd."

Biosecurity can be as simple as cutting the side out of a couple of plastic jugs, filling with a bleach solution as a footwear scrub. Or being diligent about farm traffic.

"When I have people come to my place at calving, I meet them at the gate. When I go to the vet clinic, I wear different boots than what I wear to the barn."