



Friday August 7, 2009

Farming and the 'Flu': be prepared

The very recent outbreak of H1N1 influenza (popularly known as swine flu) in a NSW Central West pig herd is a stark reminder about the vital need for farm biosecurity.

And, it's a strong signal for producers to put measures in place to protect their livestock, and their enterprise.

When the Human Swine Flu began its sweep around the world, biosecurity specialists warned that animals might be at risk from this strain.

Australia's chief vet, Dr Andy Carroll, said the pigs were probably infected by a human, and "The biggest risk is there are potentially hundreds of thousands of people or more with this virus in the Australian community. The important thing is to make sure anyone who's showing any signs of influenza doesn't work with pigs."

The farm was placed in quarantine and a management plan put in place, and NSW DPI acting chief vet, Ian Roth, told ABC Radio "We expect all the pigs to make a full recovery.

"There is no evidence to suggest the disease has spread into other pig herds."



Disease control experts and the pig industry are now focusing on stopping the virus from spreading to other piggeries.

Pig owners, and all livestock owners, should report any unusual signs of disease in their animals to a local private or government veterinarian, or to the Emergency Animal Disease Hotline 1800 675 888.



The key to prevention is good Farm Biosecurity

Animal Health Australia says all pig owners should maintain strict biosecurity procedures which include measures to prevent anyone with flu-like symptoms coming into contact with pigs.

The H1N1 2009 influenza pandemic may yet have serious consequences for livestock industries -if they are exposed. The current disease is a new influenza A type virus; the strain appears to be a recombinant of human, swine and avian viruses. So far the disease has only been detected in one herd, but with so many people infected, the risks to other pig herds are heightened.

That's why Biosecurity Queensland recommended that 23 pigs in the Ekka animal nursery should be removed from the showground site at Bowen Hills, Brisbane and be returned to their home properties before the show opened, a situation that is expected to be repeated around the country as preventative measures are enacted.

For any disease – be it swine flu, or horse flu, or any number of other transmissible viruses, bacteria and fungi, stopping exposure and minimising spread is the key. This applies equally to full-scale commercial enterprises, research facilities, organic and biodynamic farms, 'hobby' farms, school farms and in some cases, people with farm-animal pets.

The Farm Biosecurity checklist

This checklist will help ensure that you have appropriate preventative measures are in place:

1. Discourage sick people from having any close contact with animals
2. Conduct a risk assessment before allowing visitors onto the property. Check if anyone or their family members or work associates have been sick recently, or have been in contact with other pig herds and make sure their clothing, shoes and equipment are clean.
3. Keep a record of who comes in contact with your animals, where your animals have come from and where they go to
4. Visitors who have close contact with your animals should be wearing clean boots and clothes. Make sure hand and boot washing facilities are used - before and after handling animals
5. All animal handling equipment should be clean and stay on your property, unless it is thoroughly cleaned and disinfected between properties
6. Vehicles moving animals on and off your property should be cleaned

The EI flu experience

The entire horse industry experienced the effects of disease with the Equine Influenza outbreak; and is continuing to put measures in place to mitigate against further risks.



Currently, comment is being sought on a venue biosecurity security workbook which helps venue owners/managers to implement good biosecurity procedures for areas where horses gather; such as shows, rodeos, saleyards, stables, pony club meets and gymkhanas.

The workbook has been developed by representatives from a cross-section of the horse industry, with funding from Animal Health Australia.

Duncan Rowland, Manager, Disease Risk Mitigation, Animal Health Australia, said it provides the format for a horse owner or venue manager to look at their operation and, in a logical process, develop a biosecurity plan.

"All people involved in the care and use of horses should help ensure biosecurity practices are in place and are adhered to.

"Everyone has a role to play in maintaining biosecurity. The development and adoption of biosecurity plans at every level is crucial to mitigate against the risk of endemic and exotic diseases," he said.

The workbook will be reviewed in line with comments received and made available to industry organisations to print and distribute to their members. The closing date for comments is Friday 28 August, 2009.

Further information: www.animalhealthaustralia.com.au;

www.farmbiosecurity.com.au

If you see anything unusual on your property call the **Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline** on 1800 675 888 or the **Exotic Plant Pest Hotline** on 1800 084 881.)