

Unit 4: Farm health planning and biosecurity Factsheet

Farm health planning is all about the creation of a farm environment that makes the animals' lives healthier and more profitable.

The 3 main concepts of health planning are:

1. Measure

The farmer needs to identify the key problems affecting the farms' herd or flock performance. Records of all illnesses or conditions should be used to benchmark against national standards e.g. lameness in the dairy herd.

2. Manage

The farmer needs to prioritise the farm's action plan to deal with the most important problem areas first. The aim of the farmer in consultation with the vet is the effective management of these problems.

3. Monitor

After implementing the actions identified in the health plan there should be a review to assess whether the measures have been effective. It is often the case that health plans need to be changed, as different problems are eradicated.

Herd health planning

The formation of a herd health plan should incorporate the following:

- Fertility
- Milk quality and mastitis
- Lameness
- Infectious and parasitic diseases
- Nutrition
- Calves and young stock.

It is a good idea to have an efficient visual recording system for the dairy herd that can be used to plan in the future eg lameness recording charts, scour incidence charts, mastitis charts.

Flock health planning

A written animal health plan should be prepared for each flock. This should cover the yearly production cycle.

The flock health plan should cover:

- Vaccination policy and timing
- Control of external and internal parasites
- Culling and replacement policy
- Lameness and foot care
- Nutrition and monitoring of body condition scoring
- Policy on buying in new stock and biosecurity
- Ram management.

Health planning benefits include:

- i) Improved farm profits and sustainability
- ii) Better stock health and welfare
- iii) A farmer/vet relationship focused on improving performance.

Biosecurity

Biosecurity means "safe life".

Diseases can enter farms in a variety of ways:

- Animals, people and machinery moving between, and within, farms
- Introduction of new animals
- Contact with neighbours' livestock
- Contamination by vermin and wild birds
- Animals drinking from contaminated rivers and streams.

A good biosecurity regime should always be in place on a farm. It will:

- Safeguard the herd or flock against diseases
- Safeguard human health
- Improve farm efficiency by reducing the spread of diseases
- Stop the spread of diseases to neighbours' livestock.

What can farmers do to improve their biosecurity?

- Compile an efficient herd/flock health plan and adhere to it
- Maintain a closed herd/flock if possible
- Don't spread infection around your farm - have disinfectant points outside sheds
- Wear gloves during milking and lambing
- Keep boundary fences well maintained to stop the stock mixing
- Keep wild animals and vermin away from feed stocks
- Make sure farm cats can't enter the feed troughs or straw/hay sheds
- Fence off streams and rivers to avoid contamination
- Keep livestock away from fields freshly spread with slurry for six weeks.