Youth swine projects in Alabama will vary in size and scope of the operation and project. Projects are as small as one pig and as large as 30 or more sows. Housing varies from pasture lots to confinement farrow-to-finish. Regardless of the number of animals and the type of housing, animals will develop immunity to the strains of organisms within their group. As they become more confined and isolated, they will also be more susceptible to organisms not present in their space. Biosecurity procedures will reduce the chances of exposure to outside organisms and will lessen the impact if exposure happens.

Biosecurity is a set of steps taken to keep disease agents out of populations, herds, and groups of animals that already exist. These disease agents may come from a neighbor, an animal, a visitor, or a terrorist act. They may also come from the local fair. The success of a biosecurity program within a herd is the responsibility of the herd owner. Successful biosecurity plans must address how the group of animals will be isolated away from other groups, how the movement of people will be regulated and how cleaning and disinfection procedures will be used to reduce disease levels.

There is no one-size-fits-all biosecurity plan. Every operation is different and requires a different plan. Developing a plan for your operation requires input from your veterinarian or other herd health professional. This fact sheet will give you an idea of what your plan should contain and how to make your plan work.

**Considerations for Designing Your Biosecurity Plan**

When designing a biosecurity plan for your swine operation, there are many different questions to ask. First, will the project raise market or breeding animals? Raising breeding animals requires a more detailed, rigid plan because the animals you raise will hopefully go to other farms or projects. Market animals usually go to market, so there is little chance of spreading a disease to other farms. Next, will you keep animals all of the time? If you have other pigs on the property, you will need an isolation area and procedures for introducing new animals into the herd. Finally, can you keep other animals away from your herd? Most pets and wild animals can carry disease agents that can infect pigs.

Youth projects have one other key issue. Will you take your animals to shows and fairs? Taking an animal to a fair exposes the animal to all diseases at the fairgrounds. If you show your animals, you need to follow the health program you and your veterinarian or other herd health professional has for your herd. Before the show, have your veterinarian write a health certificate stating that the pigs are healthy and disease free. While at the show, keep your pigs away from others as much as you can. If you show market hogs at a terminal show (the pigs go straight to market), clean and disinfect everything you took to the show, including yourself. Stay away from your other pigs at least 48 hours after the show. If the show is not terminal, then you will take your animals home.

When you take your pigs home, you must treat them like a new animal. Breeding animals should be isolated from your breeding herd at least 60 days. Market animals going to another show should be isolated at least 30 days and kept away from other market hogs as long as possible. If you have sows and boars on your farm, even market hogs should be isolated at least 60 days.

**Using Practical Ways to Reduce the Risk of Introducing New Diseases**

There are four parts to a good beginning biosecurity plan: isolation, confinement, organization, and sanitation.

**1. Isolation**

Isolation is keeping animals away from new disease agents. New agents can come from new animals, animals returning from a show, people,
wildlife, and birds. New animals, and those returning from a show, should be kept at least a quarter of a mile away from your other pigs. If you only have market hogs, isolate new or returning animals for 30 days. If you have boars and sows, isolation should be at least 60 days. Test animals in isolation when you put them in and before you take them out. Your veterinarian or other herd health professional will help decide what to test.

Isolation also includes contact with people. Always be aware of who is on the premises. When people enter your farm, you need some way to keep them from infecting your animals. Large confinement breeding farms will require a shower before entering. Smaller, more open farms require coveralls, boot covers, and footbaths. Outside vehicles should never come in contact with your animals. When visitors are present, they should move from the youngest pigs to the oldest.

You can bring in disease agents like anyone else. Stay away from other pigs as much as possible. If you are around other pigs, clean yourself and your clothes afterward.

2. Organization

Your swine project should be organized. You need a schedule with all routine chores, shows, trips, and anything else that involves your animals. Participation in the National Pork Board’s Youth Pork Quality Assurance Program will help with scheduling and the record keeping you need to keep schedules. Anyone helping you with your project must understand the biosecurity plan.

3. Confinement

Confinement ranges from fencing around a pasture or pen to pens in a closed building. Confinement keeps animals together or apart. In a biosecurity plan, keep similar animals together. Pigs close to the same age and weight, sick pigs, and gestating sows are examples of similar animals. If you keep similar animals together, you will also keep different types of animals apart. This reduces the chance of spreading disease from one group to another.

Confinement also includes keeping other animals away from yours. This may include wildlife, vermin (rats and mice), and stray animals (including dogs and cats). Control their access to your farm. Each can carry disease agents that can infect your animals. Keep the area around your pigs free of trash, debris, underbrush, and weeds. Keep rodents, birds, and other disease-carrying pests away.

4. Sanitation

Sanitation is an important part of all biosecurity programs. Sanitation is the combination of cleaning and disinfecting. Cleaning removes feed and manure, two excellent places for disease agents to grow. Good cleaning may require removing waste feed, breaking down any equipment that doesn’t clean or drain well, removing residual water and water cups, and using sprinklers to soak manure-bound areas. Use a disinfectant on all surfaces after cleaning. A 2 to 5 percent solution of bleach is a good general purpose disinfectant.

Summary

When developing a biosecurity plan, consider your operation and the facilities on your farm. Before starting a swine project and developing a biosecurity plan, it is beneficial to seek the advice of Alabama Cooperative Extension System agents, veterinarians, swine breeders, and others who have participated in swine projects. Once the project is in operation, post signs restricting outside visitors. Isolation areas should always be in good working condition. Also, as a swine exhibitor, it is important to be educated about your project not only for yourself but also to help others who are curious about the swine operation and the importance of a biosecurity plan.