

Fences, Gates and Employees in Dairy Biosecurity

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There is the old saying “Good fences make good neighbors” that has been a guide for livestock owners over the years. Now that saying might be altered to say “Good fences might keep out bad neighbors”. The point being that appropriately designed and constructed fences and gates supported by vigilant employees can be a valuable parts of dairy biosecurity that could prevent accidental or intentionally disease introduction to a dairy. The purpose of this article is to take a pictorial look at various types of fencing and how it might prevent an unwanted disease event on your dairy.

Most dairies are using some type of pipe fencing with cable wires to keep the cows in the corrals (Picture 1). This type fencing will keep vehicles from entering the livestock corrals. However, these do not provide a barrier to keep people, stray dogs or wild animals from entering the pens. In some cases, there is a barrier of some type to keep cars away from the fences such as the irrigation ditch seen in Picture 1. In many cases, these fences are right along side the roadway allowing vehicle to drive right up to the fence (Picture 2).

The next step up in providing protection of dairy livestock would be to add space barrier between the external fencing along the roadside and the corral fencing (Picture 3). The idea for physical separation is to prevent people from throwing items directly into the corrals from the roadside. This type fencing prevents vehicles from driving right up to the inner corral fence. Note that in this picture (Picture 3), the space is so short that it is easily possible to toss something from the external fence area into the corrals. Try throwing something weighing a couple pounds and see what distance would be necessary to prevent you from throwing something from the road into the corrals. Picture 4 provides a sense of how much separation is needed. Also keep in mind that people can easily climb over pipe fences to gain access to livestock housing areas.

High fences (≥ 6 feet) such as chain-link fence are necessary to prevent the entry of people and animals into the livestock housing areas. The ideal location for this fencing is on the perimeter of the dairy. Even with chain-link fencing, it is still necessary to have a separation space between the perimeter chain-link fence and the pipe and cable corral fencing. To provide maximum security, razor-wire can be added to the top of the perimeter fence (Picture 6).

Fencing capable of keeping people and animals out should also be considered for feed preparation and storage areas (Picture 2). Harmful substances that could be placed into the livestock feeds can cause serious sickness to many animals when mixed into the TMR of the dairy.

When considering fences, remember that each fence must have a gate or several gates. Gates that remain open should be in areas where easy observation is possible and employees are present and trained to interact with visitors. As much as possible, perimeter gates should be kept closed (Picture 7). In most cases, people will drive right through an open gate or right by a “No Visitors” sign. Keypads can be used to allow entry of people that are approved for entry onto the dairy (Picture 8). Another option is to keep the gate closed and provide instructions for gaining entry by calling a cell-phone number. Signs warning of serious consequences of trespassing should be placed at all entrances to the dairy.

Since some gates will probably remain open on most dairies, it is also a good biosecurity measure to train employees to watch for unknown visitors or strangers on the dairy (Picture 9). Employees should be taught how to interact with visitors and direct them to the proper supervisor to obtain permission to be on the dairy.

Fences and gates are a part of biosecurity that allows the dairyman to sleep at nights without wondering if someone might be deliberately harming the cows. They also prevent theft of calves or cattle. Indeed, a dairy with adequate fences and gates also provides “peace of mind” for employees the milk the night shifts. Consider that over the past few years, several armed robberies of milkers have taken place on dairies in the after-hours due to lack of proper security.

Fences and gates are essential parts of dairy biosecurity. They should be much more than the white, decorative accents to dairies. Fences should be appropriately designed to keep vehicles, people, stray animals and wild animals from coming in close contact with dairy livestock and feeds. Equally necessary are the gates that provide further prevention of unwanted entry to the dairy. Take a look at your dairy today to see if your cows have adequate protection.

“Once the horse is out of the barn; it is too late to put up a gate”

Picture 1. Typical pipe fence with cable wires. Note that in the top picture there is an irrigation ditch between the roadway and the fencing that will provide some protection from direct access to corrals.



Picture 2. Access the along roadside without barrier to prevent vehicle from driving up to corrals or feed storage areas. Note the easy access to feeding areas.



Picture 3. Perimeter fencing with a space barrier between the perimeter fence and livestock corral fence. In this particular case, the space barrier is too small to prevent anyone from throwing objects into the calf corrals.



Picture 4. A pipe and cable fence along the edge of this field near the road would prevent items from being tossed into the housing areas or corrals.



Picture 5. Fencing on the perimeter of the dairy like this chain-link fence will prevent the entry of people or animals into the livestock housing areas. Appropriate separation is still required to prevent items from being thrown into cow corrals.



Picture 6. Maximum security fencing with razor wire on the top to prevent people from climbing over the fence.



Picture 7. Closed gates will keep unwanted traffic off of the dairy.



Picture 8. Keypad to control entry through perimeter gate.



Picture 9. Workers on dairies should be trained to interact with visitors so that no one is allowed to wander on the dairy without supervision or permission.



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