



AHI BULLETIN

Closed herd - what does it really mean?

Having a closed herd is one of the most effective ways a farmer has of keeping diseases out and protecting their livestock. It is an important first step in securing their farm from diseases such as IBR, Johne's and BVD. Introducing cattle is a risky practice and may damage years of animal breeding, if home stock acquire an infectious disease.

Animals which are introduced to a herd may appear healthy but could carry infections. These may spread through a herd into which new animals have been introduced. However, by having a closed herd, a farmer no longer has to worry about new animals as a source of infection.

As a first step towards closing a herd you should reduce the number of animals you introduce. Carefully think about whether you need to introduce animals at all, or if there is an alternative method of increasing stock numbers. If you have a choice, it is best practice to avoid introductions.

In dairy herds plan to breed your cows to AI and retain a well-bred bull calf to become the next 'sweeper bull'. If stock introductions are required, limit the number of herds from which animals are introduced and identify herds that have a history of good disease control practices. These herds should then become 'preferred' vendors from which to purchase stock.

Ideally only introduce stock from high-assurance herds for Johne's disease and IBR, such as test - negative closed herds with effective biocontainment practices in place. If effective biocontainment is practiced to control the spread of infection within a herd, the longer the herd is closed, the more secure from chronic infectious diseases it becomes.

Achieving a closed herd can be a challenge but the rewards of avoiding common diseases are healthy, contented stock, and improved farm production. There are more tips on preventing diseases from entering your herd, available in the Information Leaflet, Purchasing Stock: Reducing Disease Risks [click here](#).

A herd is 'closed' when no stock are introduced from outside the herd (purchased, borrowed (bull) or returned from shows or marts).

Biosecurity is a term used in disease control which encompasses both bioexclusion (keeping infectious diseases out of farms) and biocontainment (reducing infectious disease threats within the holding).