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Abattoir risk management for feedlots

**Meat & Livestock Australia
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Project**

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Managing risk associated with a nearby abattoir

Foot and mouth disease (FMD) is a highly contagious virus spread through respiratory droplets, urine, faeces and seminal fluid. When animals are kept in lairage for several days before slaughter at an abattoir, they may become infected with FMD during this time.

Additionally, at slaughter, all tissues of an animal become exposed so if an animal is infected with FMD, large viral loads will contaminate the environment. The abattoir can then act as a source of infection for other facilities housing FMD-susceptible species nearby, including feedlots. For example, the disease can spread from an abattoir to a feedlot through aerosol, fomites or contaminated wastewater.

Current regulation states that FMD-affected animals should not be sent to the abattoir with FMD unless it is for conditional slaughter.

Despite this work in Kenya and Uganda suggests that there is usually at least one undetected or unreported case of FMD appearing at each slaughterhouse per year (1).

Work in Thailand demonstrated that the risk of an FMD outbreak in local dairy farms was increased by being within 5km of an abattoir (2).

Managing risk at the feedlot

Feedlots can manage the risk associated with nearby abattoirs through the following.

Vaccination

- Ensure animals are fully vaccinated prior to entry (best protection)
- Ensure animals have received a vaccine at least 7 days prior to entry (moderate protection)
- Ensure animals receive their first vaccination on arrival (mild protection)

Feral and wild animal control

- Ensure perimeter fences are well maintained and suitable to exclude feral or wild animals
- Ensure all food (human and animal) waste is disposed of
- Enact a feral animal management plan if necessary
- Ensure all vermin are kept under control
- Store feed securely
- Check bedding for vermin infestation
- Ensure any feedlot resident dogs or cats cannot access the abattoir

Other

- Reduce the size of each intake so there are less new arrivals that are not protected by vaccination at any one time. For example, instead of taking 400 cattle monthly, take 100 weekly.

- Prevent visitors or staff working at abattoirs from being in contact with feedlot animals through visitor risk assessment (See [Biosecurity Manual](#), Appendix C for an example).
- If possible, do not send animals with clinical signs of FMD to the slaughterhouse until 14 days post recovery.
- If animals require emergency or salvage slaughter at the feedlot, ensure the effluent and contaminants from the slaughter are not running towards pens with live animals, especially new arrivals.

Managing risk at the abattoir

If possible, feedlots could discuss strategies for reducing environmental contamination at the abattoir with abattoir operators. These are summarised below.

Reducing aerosols

- Reduce time in lairage to less than 48 hours where possible, particularly when animals are sick.
- Hold live animals in the area furthest away from the feedlot.

Reducing contamination of effluent

- Map current pathways of effluent.
- Develop strategies to reduce abattoir effluent running into feedlot forage and water sources.
- Develop strategies to reduce abattoir effluent running into main roads used by feedlot delivery vehicles.
- Make sure carcasses and burial sites are not creating effluent that may run into feedlot forage, water sources or roads.

Vehicles, staff and visitors

- Ensure vehicles entering the feedlot that have been at the abattoir are cleaned and disinfected properly (See [Correct Decontamination](#)).

References

1. Adamchick J, Rich KM, Perez AM. Assessment of the Risk of Foot and Mouth Disease among Beef Cattle at Slaughter from East African Production Systems. *Viruses*. 2021 Dec;13(12):2407.
2. Sansamur C, Arjkumpa O, Charoenpanyanet A, Punyapornwithaya V. Determination of Risk Factors Associated with Foot and Mouth Disease Outbreaks in Dairy Farms in Chiang Mai Province, Northern Thailand. *Animals*. 2020 Mar;10(3):512.