Part 403 – Homeland Security and Crisis Responsibilities

Subpart H – Biosecurity Preparedness and Response

403.80 Purpose

This subpart provides policy for all NRCS employees on implementing proper biosecurity measures.

403.81 General

A. The transmission of infectious animal diseases, such as foot and mouth, avian influenza, porcine epidemic diarrhea virus (PEDv), Johne's disease, and others, threaten the Nation's food supply.

B. The spread of plant disease, pests, invasive plants and other organisms can destabilize an abundant, high-quality, and varied food supply.

C. These can also disrupt valuable ecosystem services important to American communities and national security.

D. Addressing these known and future biosecurity threats is a national priority that requires the robust cooperation and partnership of USDA, NRCS, other Federal agencies, and private and public sector entities.

403.82 References

A. Title 190, General Manual (GM), Part 414, "Invasive Species"

B. Executive Order 13112, Invasive Species

C. 190-GM, Part 404, "Pest Management"

D. Plant Protection Act, as amended (7 U.S.C. Secs. 7701–7786)

E. Animal Health Protection Act (7 U.S.C. Sec. 8301 et seq.)

403.83 Definitions

A. Biosecurity.—A series of management practices designed to reduce the risk of disease agents being introduced and spread within animal populations. Similar management practices are used to prevent the spread of invasive or noxious plant species or for prevention of plant disease. In broad terms, it refers to anything designed to prevent the transfer of disease-causing organisms.

B. Infectious Disease.—Disease caused by transmission of pathogenic microorganisms such as viruses, bacteria, fungi, or parasites.

C. Pathogen.—Any infectious agent that causes disease.

D. Disease Transmission.—Infectious diseases are transmitted from person to person, animal to animal, person to animal, animal to person, person to plant, or animal to plant by direct or indirect contact. Simple preventative biosecurity measures, such as frequent hand washing, washing vehicles between visits, and wearing disposable or disinfected footwear, can cut down on disease transmission.

E. Disease Outbreak.—The occurrence of cases of a disease that are in excess of what is normally expected in a given population.

F. Invasive Species.—Those species whose introduction causes, or is likely to cause, economic or environmental harm or harm to human health. For the purpose of this NRCS policy only, a plant species is considered "invasive" when it occurs on the Federal or State-specific noxious weed list or a list developed by the State-specific department of agriculture, department of natural resources, or similar agency with their partners and approved by the State technical committee which prohibits or cautions its use due to invasive qualities. If no appropriate list exists, the State conservationist (STC) may specify invasive species for purposes of this policy only.

G. Native Species.—With respect to a particular ecosystem, a species that, other than as a result of an introduction, historically occurred or currently occurs in that ecosystem.

H. Nonnative Species.—Within a particular ecosystem, any species—including its seeds, eggs, spores, or other biological material capable of propagating that species—that is not native to that ecosystem.

I. Noxious Weeds.—Those plant species designated as such by the Secretary of Agriculture, Secretary of the Interior, or by State law or regulation. Generally, noxious weeds will possess one or more of the characteristics of being aggressive and difficult to manage, parasitic, a carrier or host of deleterious insects or disease, and being nonnative, new to, or not common to the United States or parts thereof.

J. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).—Equipment used as a barrier between an individual and a possible threat, problem, or hazard. As a biosecurity measure, PPE as outer clothing (biosecurity attire), along with the proper protocols, are used to prevent the transmission of pathogens, seeds, and pests via contaminated clothing. Such things as cleaned and disinfected work boots, clean clothing, clean coveralls, or disposable boots are examples of PPE.

K. Pest.—A weed, insect, disease, animal, or other organism (including invasive and noninvasive species) that directly or indirectly causes damage or annoyance by destroying food and fiber products, causing structural damage, or creating a poor environment for other organisms.

L. U.S. National List of Reportable Animal Diseases (NLRAD) National Animal Health Reporting System (NAHRS) Reportable Disease List.—The annually published list of transmissible animal diseases, that, when they occur, must be reported to the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) by an office of the State veterinarian. This information will be used by APHIS in developing disease alerts and response plans.

403.84 Background

A. NRCS is a member of the USDA interagency forum of the National Food and Agriculture Council (NFAC) along with APHIS and other agencies. APHIS is the lead agency for providing technical guidance for plant and animal concerns. This information is maintained through the APHIS Web site, http://www.aphis.usda.gov/.

B. Guidelines have been developed for all USDA employees to follow to minimize risk of the spread of diseases affecting animal health and welfare, plant health, and the spread of invasive species. These guidelines can be found at the Foreign Animal Disease Preparedness and Response (FAD PReP)/National Animal Health Emergency Management System

(NAHEMS) Guidelines: Biosecurity (2016) and the National Plant Health Emergency Management Framework (2014).

C. The NRCS Associate Chief for Conservation has responsibility for NRCS conservation activities and programs that includes participation on the NFAC.

403.85 Policy

A. Basic Animal and Plant Production Protection

(1) Not every situation or action that represents a biosecurity threat can be covered in this policy. Always consider how a disease or pest might be spread—how manure, seeds, spores, or organisms can be moved on a person, tools, or vehicle—and act to prevent it.

(2) At all times, NRCS employees must adhere to the level of biosecurity applicable to the planned activity or to more stringent measures that APHIS, the State or Tribal veterinarian, STC, farmer, rancher, forest land manager, or owner has in place.

(3) Make every effort to contact the producer prior to a visit to determine the operation's biosecurity protocols. When making a visit without an appointment or prior producer authorization, observe and follow any biosecurity signage and only visit the producer's home or office. Follow biosecurity level-1 procedures (below). Follow any additional biosecurity procedures specified by APHIS, the State or Tribal veterinarian, or STC. If you can't meet these protocols, do not visit the operation; meet offsite, instead.

(4) During a disease outbreak, or during any period of perceived threat of transfer of diseases or pests to crops or animals, as defined by APHIS, the State or Tribal veterinarian, or STC, NRCS employees must not enter affected areas except in response to a request from APHIS, the State or Tribal veterinarian, or the STC. In those situations, the employee must follow the biosecurity measures as required by APHIS, the State or Tribal veterinarian, or STC. In situations where APHIS or the State veterinarian have not defined a disease outbreak and a threat is apparent, the STC may define the threat as conditions warrant.

(5) A U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) listing of potential pesticides for use against the causative agents of diseases in farm settings can be found at http://www.aphis.usda.gov/animal_health/emergency_management/downloads/fad_epa_disinfectants.pdf. Any brand-name mentioned in this policy is used for illustrative purposes and should not be construed to be an endorsement for that product.

B. Biosecurity Levels

The selection of level 0, 1, 2, or 3 biosecurity measures depends on the degree of interaction of NRCS staff with the producer's office; facilities; livestock, pasture, or range; fields; forests; and crops. To the extent possible, avoid situations that require level-3 biosecurity by conducting visits when livestock or at-risk crops are not present.

(i) Level 0

Visits to farms, ranches, woodlots, and other natural resource based operations when there is no perceived threat, NRCS employees may go about business as usual, but should maintain an awareness of where they have been and with what they have come into contact.

(ii) Level 1

- Visits to farms, ranches, woodlots, other natural resource based operations when there is a perceived threat and there is no direct contact with animals, their manure, or their facilities, or with growing crops, harmful plants, pests, or plant and tree diseases, The NRCS employee must—
  - Wear proper PPE (**Note:** PPE may be as minimal as clean footwear and clean clothing or coveralls depending on the severity of the threat).
  - Park the vehicle on hardened areas designated for parking, if available. Park the vehicle away from animal areas and out of any runoff coming from animal areas. Avoid driving in manure or wastewater runoff.
  - If possible, park at the edge of fields or on a defined roadway when working on cropland, forest, pasture, or range areas.
  - Because the length of time pathogens survive depends greatly on the individual pathogen, ambient temperature, moisture, and exposure to sunlight, a set "safe reentry" time cannot be established.
  - Wash hands with soap and water or an antibacterial gel that is at least 60-percent alcohol before entering and after leaving the premises to avoid transmitting disease agents.
  - After each day's use, remove debris, soil, manure, seeds, and organic matter from floorboards and foot pedals and spray with an approved disinfectant.
  - Keep windows closed as much as possible when onsite, and shoo flies and other insects out of the vehicle as you leave the premises.

(iii) Level 2

- Visits to farms, ranches, woodlots, or other natural resource-based operations when there is a perceived threat, and—
  - There will be minimal contact with manure, livestock, poultry, wildlife, housing (e.g., barns, pens, hutches, etc.).
  - There may be contact with mortality disposal sites or facilities.
  - There may be contact with diseased or invasive plants or pests in pasture, rangeland, forest, or crop fields.
  - Contact is unavoidable to attain the goal of the visit.
- The NRCS employee must observe the requirements of biosecurity level 1, plus—
  - Preplan the needed supplies for daily visits, including, but not limited to, boots (rubber or disposable plastic), a large water container or sprayer, a spray applicator for application of an EPA-approved disinfectant, a long-handled brush, trash bags, paper towels, liquid antibacterial soap or an antibacterial gel that is at least 60-percent alcohol, and a bucket or pail as needed.
  - Designate a "clean" area in the NRCS field vehicle to place clean equipment, clothing, and boots. Designate a "dirty" area in the NRCS field vehicle for clothing, boots, and equipment used while onsite. In many cases the clean area of the vehicle can be the inside of the passenger compartment, and the dirty area the trunk or pickup bed provided with a lidded plastic container to receive and isolate the dirty clothing, boots, and equipment.
  - Put on clean or sanitized rubber or new plastic boots prior to exiting the vehicle.
  - After the site visit, clean soil, manure, seeds, and organic matter from equipment and rubber boots with a brush and water. Brush these materials off clothing before leaving the operation. Disinfect the equipment and

boots with an EPA-approved disinfectant solution. Mix and apply the disinfectant according to label directions to ensure the proper contact time of the disinfectant with the surface being disinfected. Dispose of disinfectant solution according to the label. Do not discard unused disinfectant on the ground.

- If the vehicle is contaminated with soil, manure, seeds, or other organic matter during the site visit, clean any contaminants from tires and wheel-wells with water and a brush. If possible, also remove any contaminants from other parts of the vehicle before leaving the operation. Disinfect the tires and wheel wells with an EPA-approved disinfectant solution. If possible, wash the vehicle before visiting another operation. Give extra attention to cleaning the tires, wheel wells, and undercarriage.
- Place plastic boots in a plastic trash bag and leave the bag on the premises for disposal by the owner or producer or place the bag in a designated "dirty" area of the NRCS field vehicle for proper disposal back at the NRCS office.

(iv) Level 3

- Visits to farms, ranches, woodlots, or other natural resource-based operations when there is a perceived threat and there will be—
  - Extended contact with livestock, poultry, wildlife, manure, and housing (e.g., barns, pens, hutches, etc.).
  - Animal mortality caused by disease, or there are animal disease threats in the area, such as walking through narrowly confined pens or lots where animals are within reach or handled in the process of working and when under restrictions imposed by APHIS, the State or Tribal veterinarian, or the STC.
  - Direct contact with plants or trees where there is the potential for infectious disease transmission to or from pasture, rangeland, forest, or crop fields.
  - Contact is unavoidable to attain the goal of the visit.
- The NRCS employee will follow level-2 biosecurity plus the following procedures:
  - Preplan the needed supplies and clothing for daily visits, including, but not limited to, coveralls (cloth or disposable), and headwear (cloth or disposable).
  - Put on a pair of clean coveralls and headwear for each site visit.
  - After the visit, remove coveralls and headwear in such a manner that they are inside out and place them in a large canvas or plastic bag. Cloth coveralls and headwear will be saved for laundering.
  - Launder all cloth coveralls, headwear, and any cloth storage bags after each site visit.
  - Wash hair if hair has not been appropriately covered, and clean under fingernails.
  - Do not visit more than one livestock or animal confinement operation of the same species per day. Some producers may request several days between farm visits by NRCS staff. Follow all producer-established biosecurity protocols.
  - Include a camera and airtight closable plastic bags, if plant collection or identification is anticipated.
    -- Use a camera to photograph unfamiliar plants for a safe method of plant identification.

-- Store plant samples or plant pests in an airtight closable plastic bag if they must be removed from the site for offsite identification.
-- Dispose of materials identified as diseased, infested, noxious, or invasive in a manner that will prevent spreading to other locations.

C. Documentation

Document the producer's biosecurity protocols, any reported infectious diseases, invasive species, noxious weeds, or other pests. Document all biosecurity procedures followed in the Form NRCS-CPA-6, "Conservation Assistance Notes" (e.g., "Followed level-1 biosecurity protocols").

D. For employees involved with farming operations on their own time, follow the appropriate biosecurity level to avoid transmitting organisms from that farm to a client's farms, or vice versa. As appropriate, change into clean clothes and wash prior to going to work.

403.86 Roles and Responsibilities

A. The deputy chief for science and technology is responsible for ensuring that biosecurity policies are periodically reviewed and kept current.

B. Regional conservationists are responsible for ensuring that States, Tribal liaisons, and the Caribbean and Pacific Island Areas are familiar with the agency policy on biosecurity measures.

C. State conservationists and the director of the Pacific Islands and Caribbean Area—

(1) Communicate the NRCS policy to all offices, State, and Tribal partners, technical service providers (TSPs), and other partner organizations.
(2) Provide all NRCS offices with required funding, equipment, materials, and information to implement biosecurity measures and procedures. This includes properly equipped vehicle, office space, and facilities for cleaning equipment and storing equipment and supplies.
(3) Maintain communication with local APHIS officials and the State or Tribal veterinarian concerning outbreaks of infectious animal and plant diseases, pests, and invasive species and inform all offices, State and Tribal partners, TSPs, and other partner organizations about the risk and additional biosecurity protocols, if any and make the results of that communication known to field staff.

D. District conservationists (or designated employees responsible for local management of NRCS resources) must—

(1) Ensure local NRCS staff follow NRCS biosecurity policies as stated above, to prevent the spread of infectious livestock and poultry diseases, plant pests, plant diseases, and noxious or invasive plants. Additional information for NRCS field staff regarding safety and health can be found in Title 360, General Manual (GM), Part 420, "Safety and Health Management Program."
(2) Ensure that proper and complete documentation of the producer's biosecurity protocols and any reportable infectious diseases, plant pests, plant diseases, and noxious/invasive plants are noted in the producer's Form NRCS-CPA-6, "Conservation Plan Notes."
(3) Ensure local partners are familiar with the above responsibilities and procedures.

(4) Provide a status report as requested to the appropriate line officer of expenditures, activities, and conditions in the local area for NRCS biosecurity preparedness and response.