

ASSOCIATION OF HERD NUMBERS

Background

The *Tuberculosis Control Order (NI) 1999* defines a herd as “...a group of animals kept, managed or housed together, on a holding in such manner and under such conditions as will in the opinion of a veterinary inspector minimize the possibility of infection to any other animals whether kept on the same holding or another holding”.

For disease control and prevention purposes the group of cattle that must be considered is the herd. The definition permits a herd to consist of cattle from one or more herd numbers.

For administrative purposes Veterinary Service links the different herd numbers, that constitute a herd, by “association”.

Purpose of Association

The aim of associating herd numbers is to establish epidemiological units (herds) for cattle by linking different herd numbers, on the APHIS computer, using clear unambiguous guidelines. By establishing which herd numbers constitute an epidemiological unit, control and prevention of, both enzootic (e.g. TB) and epizootic (e.g. Foot & Mouth), disease can be optimised.

Implications

The *TB Control Order (NI)1999* Para 4 says “where the Department knows or suspects that... a herd is diseased, ...it shall serve on the keeper thereof a notice informing him of the fact.”

Para 5(1) requires that a person on whom a notice is served shall detain the herd on the holding on which it is kept (i.e. movement of animals from the holding is restricted).

The resulting movement restriction and testing regime for the herd will apply to ALL the (associated) herd numbers, which constitute the herd. It is important that associated herd numbers are tested on, or close to, the same day. This is particularly important for restricted herd tests. ‘Staggering’ of tests permits the spread of disease.

Criteria for association of Herd Numbers

Background

Herds are associated for disease reasons when there is a risk of infectious disease spread between them due to the way they are managed. Examples include: -

- Shared grazing.
- Shared housing (risk of disease depends on proximity and disease involved).
- Shared testing and/or handling facilities.
- Repeated unlicensed or non-notified movement of animals between the herds.
- MC2 documents/confirmation stickers issued to one herd but used by another herd keeper.

Associated herds must always have the same disease (TB/BR) status and restrictions. Such herds may not be disassociated while disease restrictions apply.

Animal(s) are not permitted to move from herds that are subject to disease restrictions. This also applies to moves from associated herds. Exceptionally, permission may be granted, by Regional SPVOs, on the recommendation of a Field DVO, to move animals from one associated herd to another. Such permission will generally only be granted for serious animal welfare reasons or other exceptional circumstances.

As associating herd numbers may cause upset to the herd keepers, and may be disputed, it is important that the Veterinary Officer (who opines that the associated herd numbers are kept, managed or housed together) can support his judgement with evidence that satisfies the criteria detailed in this instruction.

Direct or indirect contact between cattle in different herd numbers, will require them to be considered as one herd where there is evidence that they are then being kept, managed or housed together. By reason of information available the VO should associate herd numbers, which meet one or more of the following criteria:

Cattle Kept Together

Cattle, from separate herd numbers, mixed for period of time (includes time spent together at TB/Br test, vaccination, drenching, bulling etc.) permitting disease spread by direct contact.

Evidence required

- Herd keeper(s) may acknowledge e.g. when applying for new herd number, TB investigation report

- Cattle mixed at TB/BR test
- Cattle mixed at herd audit
- Other PVP, VO or AHWI visual proof/testimony

Cattle Housed Together

Cattle sharing house, permitting disease spread by aerosol if sharing same air space or by indirect contact if sharing same housing, or equipment, at separate times (includes milking parlours, sick bays, holding pens, calving pens, crushes etc)

Evidence required

- Herd keeper(s) may acknowledge e.g. when applying for new herd number, TB investigation report
- PVP, VO or AHWI visual proof/testimony

Cattle Managed Together

One or more herd keepers has a managerial interest in different herd numbers.

Evidence required

- Financial e.g. one, or more, herd keeper(s) dealing in cattle for more than one herd number
- Documentary e.g. one, or more, herd keeper(s) conducting business, signing documents for more than one herd number
- Grants & subsidies e.g. IACS form may refer to land used by one herd keeper but known to be used by another
- Transport e.g. one, or more herd keeper(s), transporting cattle from more than one herd number
- Shared stockmen i.e. one, or more stockmen (includes herd keepers), working directly with cattle, from separate herd numbers
- Movement between herd numbers i.e. significant movement of cattle either unilateral or bilateral
- Shared herd keeper accommodation i.e. two, or more, herd keepers residing in same house/location e.g. husband/wife, mother/son, father/three sons etc

Notes

- VO must decide from the evidence available which group of animals constitutes a 'herd' for the purposes of cattle movement restrictions, thus minimising possibility of infection being transmitted to cattle out with the 'herd'.
- If the evidence indicates that restricting a group of animals that consists of only one herd number will minimise possibility of infection spread, then there is no reason to 'associate' this herd number with any other herd numbers (i.e. the herd consists of cattle from only one herd number).
- However if the group of animals that must be restricted to minimise possibility of infection spread includes two or more herd numbers, then they must be associated (i.e. the herd consists of cattle from more than one herd numbers).
- Strong evidence of criteria 1 or 2 being met will require herd number association.
- Support evidence for criteria 3 is usually easily uncovered, and does not require herd keeper assistance and can be used as basis for association when strong evidence that criteria 1 or 2 are being fulfilled is unavailable.
- In the absence of criteria 3 being satisfied association of herd numbers should only be considered when strong evidence exists that criteria 1 or 2 has been satisfied.
- Indirect contact between cattle may not be grounds for association if it is established that satisfactory C&D occurs between batches.

Disassociation of Herd Numbers

It may be that evidence emerges that there are no longer any grounds for maintaining herd number association. If this evidence can be substantiated herd numbers may be disassociated.

It is a common occurrence that herd associations only become a topic for discussion after a TB breakdown with the subsequent movement restrictions on all associated herd numbers. Even if the herd keepers can demonstrate that there are no grounds for association at this stage, **association must remain until the breakdown is resolved**. The time for disassociating is not in the middle of a breakdown.