Topic 7. Wildlife, Pests, and Health Monitoring
(Including cervids as wildlife vectors)

Wildlife and pests are a routine part of the environments in which livestock are raised and can serve as indirect pathways for disease movement. Birds, mammals, insects, and other free-ranging species move across property boundaries without regard to fencing or ownership, making them an important consideration in biosecurity education.

In many settings, wildlife interact with livestock areas through shared water sources, feed areas, pastures, or shelter. Small mammals, rodents, and insects may enter barns, coops, or feed storage areas as part of normal environmental activity. From a biosecurity perspective, these interactions are generally understood as background risk rather than unusual events.

Cervids, such as white-tailed deer, are of particular interest because they are widespread in Ohio and may act as wildlife disease vectors. While cervids are not livestock, their movement across agricultural landscapes can create indirect interfaces with domestic animals, especially where pastures, water sources, or feed storage areas overlap with wildlife habitat. Biosecurity education focuses on recognizing these interfaces rather than attempting to control wildlife presence.

Health monitoring provides an important lens through which wildlife and pest interactions can be understood. Routine observation of animals over time helps establish a sense of what is normal for a given operation. Changes in behavior, appetite, movement, or appearance may provide early indications that animals are responding to environmental stressors, exposure, or illness.

In small and backyard operations, health monitoring is often informal and based on daily familiarity with individual animals or groups. This close observation can support early recognition of subtle changes, particularly when combined with basic records that provide context over time. When unusual patterns are noticed, awareness of recent wildlife activity, environmental conditions, or seasonal changes can help inform further evaluation.

Biosecurity education emphasizes that wildlife exposure and health monitoring are closely linked. Because wildlife and pests cannot be fully excluded from many livestock environments, especially pasture-based systems, attention is placed on understanding how environmental interactions and animal health observations fit together. The goal is not to eliminate risk, but to support thoughtful interpretation of what is observed within the broader

context of an operation.

References

United States Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. (2015). Biosecurity guide for livestock and poultry producers. https://www.aphis.usda.gov

Ohio Department of Natural Resources. (2020). Wildlife disease and livestock interactions. https://ohiodnr.gov

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2011). Approaches to managing animal disease risks at the wildlife–livestock interface. https://www.fao.org

World Organisation for Animal Health. (2019). Terrestrial animal health code: Wildlife and biosecurity considerations. https://www.woah.org