Reasons for non-response to a questionnaire on bio-security at farm level

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We often seek information from farmers and when they don't respond we wonder why. We tried to find the answer...

The aim of the study was to collect data on bio-security routines and contacts between farms with cloven-hoofed animals for use when modelling disease spread.

Material and methods

Farms were randomly sampled from the official Swedish farm register, n=1486. Questionnaires on bio-security were sent by mail in June 2006 and in July a reminder was sent to non-responders. Farmers not wanting to take part in the study were asked to explain their motive for not participating.

Results and Discussion

The response-rate was 34 %. Out of 982 farmers not responding, 314 (32 %) explained their motive and among them the reasons for non-response were distributed as shown in table 1.

No cloven hoofed animals on the farm	50%
Do not want to participate/lack of time	21%
Prefer to answer by phone	8%
Other reasons	4%
Lost the questionnaire	4%
Moved away	3%
Do not regard their small herd relevant for the study	3%
Fed up with paperwork and bureaucracy	2%
Injured or diseased	2%
Require economic compensation to participate	2%
Dead	1%

Table 1, Reasons for non-response to a questionnaire on Bio-security at farm level.

- The main reason for non-response was **discontinued animal production** on the farm.
- Lack of time and "do not want to participate" were not separate alternatives, but several farmers emphasised that **lack of time** was the problem and not the willingness to participate.

Acknowledgements

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Photo: Bengt Ekberg, SVA

- Answering the questionnaire **by phone** was offered as an option when sending the reminder and some farmers preferred this alternative.
- Several farmers with **small herds** did not consider their herds relevant for the study. Among those contacting us by phone, several were persuaded to participate and were therefore not included as non-responders.
- **Economic** compensation did not seem to be an important reason for not responding, only a few farmers gave this reason.

Conclusions

Many farmers had not reported ceased animal production to the official farm register; therefore there was a high over-coverage in our sample.

Due to time restraints the questionnaires were sent during summertime. Several responders and non-responders pointed out the bad seasonal timing.

Our experience is that the personal phone contact was very effective when persuading farmers to participate.

Special approaches might be needed when including farms with few animals, since many of them seem not to regard themselves as "farmers" or their animals as "herds".

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