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Johne's and Biosecurity- Where's the link?

Source: Emily McDonald, Industry Development Coordinator

As dairy producers, you work very closely with your herd veterinarian and are committed to maintaining the health and welfare of your herd. Health maintenance is about minimizing the risk for disease transmission in your herd.

At this year's Western Canadian Dairy Seminar, Dr. David Kelton (professor at the Ontario Veterinary College) gave a presentation called *What's Mine is Yours- Perspectives on Biosecurity for Canadian Dairy Farms*. Dr. Kelton has examined many current definitions for biosecurity but noted his favorite as "...the protection of people, animals and ecological systems against disease and other biological threats." (abcrc.org.au/pages/About.aspx).

Dr. Kelton has divided biosecurity for animal production systems into four distinct components including: the spread of a foreign animal disease; spread of an endemic (common/widespread) disease among herds and regions within that country; spread of an endemic disease (Johne's disease) among individuals; and transmission of zoonotic diseases.

The development and implementation of biosecurity standard practices have varied across agricultural commodity groups. Dr. Kelton noted that while there is no compelling argument for implementing the intensive approach that some other industries (poultry and swine) have implemented, there is a definite need to develop best management practices that will decrease the risk of disease within the dairy industry. Critics have pointed to the significant number of epidemics which have swept through Canadian dairy farms over the past 20 years, including

acute Bovine Viral Diarrhea (BVD), digital dermatitis, neosporosis and Johne's disease (JD). Given the frequency with which animals move from herd to herd and province to province, the spread of these diseases from infected herds to susceptible herds has been rapid.

"There are opportunities to implement targeted biosecurity programs on dairy farms, aimed at minimizing the risk of introducing specific diseases not currently present on a farm or decreasing the transmission of existing infectious disease from calves (the most susceptible animals) on the farm," said Kelton. "Examples for drivers for activity in these areas include the upcoming reduction in somatic cell count penalty level and the roll-out of JD control programs across much of the country."

Dr. Kelton went on to describe some details of the Ontario Johne's Education and Management Assistance Program which is comparable to Alberta's Johne's Disease Initiative (AJDI). Both programs help manage disease on-farm and were developed by dairy producers, for dairy producers. However, Ontario's program includes individual cow milk testing at the specific "testing window" for a producer's herd. Alberta's program uses pooled environmental (manure) samples from six locations around the farm (instead of the milk samples) to determine if the *Mycobacterium avium paratuberculosis* bacteria are present.

Dr. Kelton has emphasized, disease control programs in fact are biosecurity measures for you to use in order to manage disease on your farm.

More than 10 per cent of Alberta producers have already participated in the AJDI. Please call your local herd veterinarian today to complete your Johne's disease risk assessment and environmental sampling at your next herd health visit.

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