

Johne's Disease: Why Test and Cull Won't Cut it!

Source: Emily McDonald, Industry and Member Services Coordinator

If you attended this year's Spring Producer Meetings, you would have heard either Dr. Gerald Ollis or Dr. Herman Barkema introduce the Alberta Johne's Disease Initiative (AJDI). They delivered the latest information on Johne's Disease and some very preliminary results from the risk assessment's (RAs) completed to date. These results confirmed the presence of the MAP (the bacteria that causes Johne's) in some of the manure samples collected to date on participating farms.

It is known that cows shed the MAP bacteria before they ever show clinical signs of the disease. Therefore, cows that are infected but not yet identified as having this disease, are in fact shedding and spreading this bacteria amongst the herd and calves.

We already have 60 farms enrolled in the AJDI, but we are eager for you and your herd vet to participate in this initiative to help reach the goal of 50 per cent of producers enrolled by December 31, 2011.

At the time of your AJDI Risk Assessment, your herd veterinarian will collect six manure samples from different areas of your farm. Specific areas could include: maternity pens, sick cow pens, lactating cow area, and manure storage/lagoon. The samples are sent to a lab at the University of Calgary, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, to be cultured. Culturing these manure samples will determine the presence of MAP bacteria in the manure. It's important point to note that the results are only a snapshot of whether or not the bacteria are present on your farm on that day.

This is because the bacteria is shed by cows intermittently, meaning they shed the bacteria at different times throughout their life. So cows may be shedding the bacteria today, but they might not have been last week and moreover they might not be next week. Dr. Barkema's team is in the midst of a research project to determine more completely when animals shed these bacteria.

If you have infected cows that are shedding the bacteria - the manure cultures will be positive. If you have infected cattle but they are not shedding the bacteria - the manure cultures will be negative. So a negative result does not necessarily mean the disease is not there, it only means that at the point in time when the samples were taken, cattle may not have been shedding the bacteria in the area in which the manure samples were collected.

This is the reason the Alberta Johne's Disease Initiative focuses on Best Management Practices (BMPs) and not the results of the current tests. At the time of your herd's risk assessment, you and your veterinarian will complete the management plan to identify herd specific BMPs to manage and control Johne's Disease.

For more information about how to implement BMPs on your farm, AJDI or how to host an on-farm workshop, please contact Emily McDonald at 780-577-3307.



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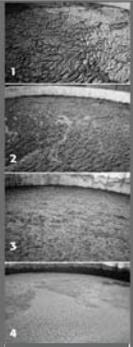
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