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Where are the Johne's Disease Risks?

Source: Emily McDonald, Industry Development Coordinator

One of the challenges in managing Johne's Disease is knowing where your risks are. Identifying the greatest risks on your farm starts by completing a risk assessment (RA) with your herd veterinarian. It is important to remember that you are trying to achieve a low score in each section of the RA. The lower the section scores, the lower the risk is that you have or may spread Johne's Disease (JD) within your herd; therefore lower equals better! This is much like the game of golf, in which you want a low score at the end of the game in order to be successful. As of July 7, 2011, 121 herd RAs have been completed.

Those completed RAs revealed several high risk areas on Alberta farms which we have listed below along with some recommended management practices that may help you reduce your farm's RA score in these sections. All statistics below represent percentages of farms that have completed a RA.

Section 1: General

- 61 per cent - no restriction of any visitor access to any animal
- 60 per cent - purchased animals from multiple herds or at public auctions
- 73 per cent - no precautions were taken to prevent JD entering the herd

Best Management Practices

- Maintain a closed herd (introduce new genetics by using frozen semen or embryos)
- Know the history of the herd you are buying from
- Pre-test mature cow purchases
- Buy from negative tested herds
- Implement biosecurity protocols for visitors to your farm (such as having extra boots for them to wear, and limiting their access to young stock)

Section 2: Pre-weaned heifers

- 48 per cent - some calves may be given colostrums from an animal other than their dam
- 42 per cent - non-saleable milk is always (weekly) fed to calves
- 57 per cent - calves fed bulk tank milk, or milk pooled from several cows

Best Management Practices

- Feed colostrum only from a single cow to a single calf- do NOT feed pooled colostrums
- Feed colostrum/milk from test negative cows
- Prevent manure contamination of colostrums during collection by utensils, hands and during storage
- Substitute a good high quality milk replacer for whole milk
- Pasteurize on-farm milk (waste or from the bulk tank)

Section 4: Calving area

- 74 per cent - over 50 per cent of the time, more than one cow is in the calving pen/area

Best Management Practices

- Have dedicated maternity pens that are separate from hospital pens and keeping the pens clean, dry and very well bedded
- Never allow animals suspected of having JD in the calving area
- Remove calves from the dam within 30 minutes of birth to an area that has never held cows
- Do not let the calf nurse
- Clip the cows udder prior to calving

Producers enrolled in the Alberta Johne's Disease Initiative are reminded that you must complete the Johne's Disease Risk Assessment every 10-14 months, so remember to book that date with your veterinarian to continue in the program.

Please contact Emily McDonald for more information at 780-577-3307 or emcdonald@albertamilk.com