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Johne's Disease Control Programs Across Canada

Source: Dr. Ann Godkin with files from Emily McDonald, Industry Development Coordinator

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Alberta is not the only province working on Johne's Disease control. There are many programs offered across Canada that have been designed to help create awareness about this disease.

To ensure Canadian dairy products come from herds where Johne's Disease is under control and cows are not at risk of infection, the Canadian Johne's Initiative designed an on-farm program in 2007 to achieve this goal. Today, producer and veterinarian participation is critical to success in several provinces that have moved ahead to implement the program. To get underway, each provincial Johne's group has had to seek funding from producer organizations and, if available, from either provincial or federal governments.

Over the last four years, some provinces have gone ahead with program implementation while others are moving at a slower pace. While most provincial dairy groups are keen to have a Johne's program in place, the rate and style of program implementation mostly reflects the different ways funds have been put forward for Johne's prevention. Let's take a closer look at the current status of Johne's programs across Canada:

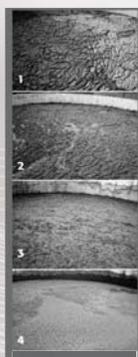
Alberta first off the mark

Having started a voluntary program in 2001, Alberta has had the longest running Johne's control program of any Canadian province. Although some momentum was lost in past years, Alberta Milk is supporting a brand new program, the Alberta Johne's Disease Initiative (AJDI). The new initiative is based on a herd risk assessment (RA) and management plan (MP) completed with a producer's herd health veterinarian. Reimbursement of \$200 per on-farm visit is available for the veterinarian's time in completing the first RA and MP. Environmental (manure) samples are taken at this visit and testing costs of these samples are also covered in the program. Approximately 25 per cent of Alberta producers are now enrolled in the AJDI.

Alberta is the only province (so far) to incorporate a Johne's herd status program. In this program, herds can rise through four levels of Johne's status. They have to follow an increasingly rigorous testing protocol and add no animals from outside the herd or only those from herds of similar or higher Johne's status. They can advance from Level 1 to Level 4—the highest level—over a period of no less than two years.

Ontario gets strong producer support

In Ontario, producers have strongly supported and funded the voluntary Johne's program rolled out in January 2010. Program on-farm components include testing all cows in the milking herd at one time using either a serum or CanWest DHI milk ELISA test; completing an annual Risk Assessment and Management Plan (RAMP) with the herd veterinarian; removing high-titre (HT) cows (1.0 or higher





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ELISA scores) to deadstock, burial or composting.

Participating producers are reimbursed \$8 per cow tested and \$500 per HT cow removed. Through the first year, enrollment in the full program has been running at about 70 per cent of eligible herds.

Quebec government runs program

In Quebec, the provincial government conducts and funds a slightly different program. In the first year, enrolled herds participate in a risk analysis, similar to the Alberta and Ontario RAMP, with their herd vet.

The government pays 75 per cent of the veterinary time and the producer the remaining 25 per cent, with up to a two-hour consultation being funded. In the second and subsequent years, the producer follows up on the vet's recommendations and begins testing.

Testing of either six environmental samples—manure samples from the cow housing—by culture or milk ELISA of up to 60 cows is required annually. The program subsidizes testing at a rate of \$15 per culture instead of the regular \$25 fee, and \$8 per milk ELISA. The program also pays 75 per cent of the annual one-hour vet visit cost.

As a condition of joining the program, producers agree to either retain test-positive cows identified or to remove them only to slaughter or a laboratory—they agree not to sell any known test-positive animals to other producers. The government tracks test-positive animal movement using the cow's number from the provincial traceability program (ATQ).

This spring, 16 per cent of Quebec dairy herds are participating in the Johne's program

B.C. offers testing

British Columbia began to offer Johne's testing to dairy and beef producers at the provincial diagnostic laboratory in the Spring, 2011. The B.C. initiative also endorses vet-conducted

on-farm risk assessments to highlight necessary herd management changes.

Atlantic provinces join forces

The Atlantic Johne's Initiative, supported by the four Atlantic provincial producer boards, started in June. This program, too, will involve subsidized testing and subsidized vet consultations to conduct the on-farm RAMP.

Differences minimal

While it may appear the provinces are going in somewhat different directions as they roll out their Johne's programs, the basic elements of all these initiatives are similar. Programs remain voluntary, although financial support to offset costs of Johne's testing, veterinary services or both, encourages producers to participate.

All programs incorporate testing. While programs may have either cows or environmental samples tested, the objective is the same: identifying whether a herd is likely to have Johne's and partially quantify whether Johne's is likely to be a major or minor problem.

Most importantly, all programs strongly endorse the vet-producer consultation or RAMP approach.

While implementation is occurring quite independently in each province, differences are quite minimal when examined closely. Each program has good scientific support and continuous scientific evaluation. Each program has an excellent chance for success if producers and vets continue to participate. Participation is critical. The ultimate goal of all these programs is to have a national dairy industry that can state all Canadian herds are enrolled and actively participating in recognized Johne's programs shown to effectively limit the disease's spread. We want Canadian dairy products to come from farms where the next generation of cows will be from our own, new dairy heifers raised to be Johne's-free.

Ann Godkin, a veterinary scientist with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, chairs the Ontario Johne's Industry Working Group.



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