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Geek Out! Data Analysis

Source: Jodi Flaig, Industry and Member Services Coordinator

We call, we write, we've hosted on-farm workshops and we may have even knocked on your door; what else do we behind the Alberta Johne's Disease Initiative (AJDI) spend our energy on? Well we like to geek out research style! One of the commitments of the AJDI is to further research and learning about Johne's disease:

Herd level prevalence of MAP in Alberta dairy herds using environmental samples

Through the environmental sampling (ES) completed as part of an AJDI Risk Assessment (RA) we can draw a more comprehensive picture of the infection rate of *Mycobacterium avium* subspecies *paratuberculosis* (MAP), the bacteria responsible for causing Johne's disease, in Alberta dairy herds. Here are some highlights:

- Currently large herds are more likely to have positive MAP results for ES samples taken on farm.
- Most of the infected herds have only a very small number of infected cows on their farm.
- Most farms didn't even know that their farm is infected.
- We will not be able to detect all positive farms with a single test event.
- Comparing first and second year ES results, we saw that many farms changed their status from negative to positive.
- The best sampling locations to accurately collect samples were manure concentration areas and manure storage areas.

Infection Study

These are two of the questions we've been waiting for: when does the infection take place and how much infectious material does it take? This study is currently underway at the University of Calgary, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine using Holstein calves and initial results suggest as little as two teaspoons of infected material can lead to infection of the calf.

High risk management practices

A comparison of management characteristics between MAP positive and negative herds will identify common management practices associated with high risk transmission of MAP as well as identify which management practices have been the most successful in maintaining negligible or low MAP levels.

Current areas identified as common amongst MAP positive herds are:

- No visitor restriction of visitor access to any animals.
- No consideration of the Johne's infection status of the seller's herd when purchasing animals.
- Feeding pooled milk to calves.
- Multiple cows in the pen during calving.

The value of multi-year testing

The first AJDI RA and ES are meant to provide a baseline to determine initial prevalence of MAP. Completing an AJDI RA and ES annually then provides the tools to measure improvements from one year to the next as a result of a change in management practices. Based on long-term U.S. research, MAP was significantly lower in third, fourth and fifth years of program participation than during the first. This strongly demonstrates that changes in management practices can be influential in reducing MAP prevalence within a herd.

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