

Farmers urged to take control

DAIRY and beef farmers have been urged to "grasp the nettle" and take control of Johne's Disease (JD).

Karen Bond, Dairy Co vet, told a farm meeting that most farmers were aware of losses associated with clinical JD – but often unnoticed production effects were a much greater financial burden.

She said: "Cows infected with JD are more likely to suffer from mastitis, high cell counts, lameness and be infertile.

"They also produce, on average, 4,000kg less milk in their lifetime than their uninfected herd mates."

She was speaking at a meeting held by the Bishopton Veterinary Group at the Smiths' Crosby Grange Farm, in Thornton-le-Moor, near Northallerton.

She said: "Establishing whether JD is present on your farm is the first step and, from there, a robust testing and control programme should be initiated in consultation with your

LIVESTOCK

Johne's Disease can affect production in dairy herds, resulting in financial losses

veterinary surgeon.

"The important things to remember are that this is a long-term strategy and things may initially appear to get worse before they get better and it's crucial not to become disheartened.

"Also, use your vet to help with the interpretation of test results."

A good testing regime and veterinary advice could make a big difference to the health and profitability of a herd.

She and Bishopton vet Jonathan Statham explained how the Smith family had taken steps to control Johnes.

Calving box hygiene was vitally important

Ideally, each cow would calve in an individual box, which would be mucked out and disinfected between calvings, to avoid the calf ingesting faeces from any cow other than its mother, and eliminating cross-suckling. However, this is impractical for most farms.

The Smiths use NMR milk-testing to categorise cows as high or lower risk.

The high-risk are housed separately from the rest of the dry cows and are calved in an individual calving box, which is cleaned out between cows.

Lower-risk cows are calved in a communal straw yard. However, this yard is kept at a low-stocking density, is bedded up every day and mucked out every fortnight to keep faecal contamination and chance of disease to a minimum.

Once colostrum has been administered to a calf, it is placed in a cordoned-off area of the yard to prevent cross-suckling.

The second key strategy is colostrum management

Heifer replacements are fed only on colostrum from their mother and then go on to a powdered milk replacer – the freeze-drying process used in its production kills the mycobacterium that causes Johne's Disease.

If calves are born to a high risk dam, or if the dam

has produced insufficient colostrum, the calf is fed colostrum from a cow classified as lower risk through testing.

Antibiotic dump milk is never fed to heifer replacements as cows suffering repeat cases of mastitis are more likely to be infected with Johne's.

The Smiths use NMR's Herdwise screening programme to identify cows at high risk of developing disease and becoming infectious.

Individual milk samples are tested quarterly for Johne's antibodies. Cows with a high antibody result

are labelled as high risk and identified using a coloured tag.

They are then bred to a beef sire and managed separately at calving. Heifer calves born from cows that become high risk are classified high risk, even if they have not yet had high antibody tests.

The nature of Johne's means all current tests have difficulty in detecting cows in the early stages of the disease.

Mr Statham said: "Control hinges on preventing calves currently being born from becoming infected but, as a consequence, it will take a minimum of two to three years for these animals to work through the system before any fall in prevalence of disease is seen. But progress can be and is being made."



ADVICE: Jonathan Statham, of the Bishopton Veterinary Group, and Karen Bond, Dairy Co vet, at the Johne's Disease farm meeting, near Northallerton

WHAT IS JOHNE'S

Johne's is spread primarily by faecal-oral transmission or through feeding infected colostrum to calves.

Although all cattle are potentially susceptible, calves are much more likely to become infected due to the more permeable nature of their gut. The first six hours of life represent a particular risk and the majority of infections arise during this period.

Most infected cattle will not show any clinical signs until well into adulthood. Some might never show any clinical signs, before they are culled owing to other factors.

However, cattle infected with Johne's are likely to suffer other conditions such as mastitis, lameness and infertility – all leading to earlier culling.



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