

## **Johne's Disease - What Should We Do?**

Johne's disease is a unique and extremely serious problem for the livestock industries, and the dairy industry in particular. From any of a variety of perspectives, the current status of this disease provides disturbing contrasts.

1. Here is a problem with tremendous economic impact in affected herds, yet a substantial percentage of producers are unfamiliar with the disease, let alone its importance.
2. Here is an infectious disease that has been actively spreading through the country, and its occurrence has increased in dairy herds, and yet few states or individual producers have established plans or programs to limit its spread.
3. Here is a disease for which control procedures would also limit spread of other important infectious diseases, a disease whose entry into herds can be prevented, and yet prevailing producer opinion is that it is best to avoid acknowledgement of the risks or testing for identification of affected animals.
4. Research is required to improve our understanding of the disease, to improve our tools for identification and control, and to clarify its potential public health significance, and yet over the last five years less than 1% of federal dollars for animal health research and similarly little animal industry money have been directed at Johne's disease.

What explains these troubling contrasts between clear-cut needs for action, versus obvious lack of action, or even direction towards action? The primary roadblock to implementing effective efforts at research, surveillance and control programs, and on-farm management practices appears to be the lack of awareness and education about this problem.

There are well entrenched attitudes about Johne's disease that promote the current inactivity. Many perceive the problem is not particularly urgent or important, although there is plenty of evidence to demonstrate it is both. Many perceive the problem is unworkable, and spending time or money on the problem would be frustrating, unprofitable, and unrewarding.

A closer look shows that, in fact, herds with infection can take dramatic steps towards eliminating it. While our identification techniques are imperfect, they can be very effective when properly used. More dairies are free of the disease than infected. Herds currently free of the disease have very compelling reasons to take action towards remaining free. These are a few of the reasons that dairy producers need to know more about this problem and how to work with it.

Working with leaders in the Colorado dairy industry, the Integrated Livestock Management program at CSU is initiating some activities to help Colorado producers deal with this important problem. The primary component is an education program. To

this end we are including a questionnaire in this newsletter. Responses will help us formulate our educational materials to address specific needs. Please help us by taking the few minutes needed to fill out the form and return it to CSU.

This Spring we will be conducting seminars for Colorado producers. The goal is to provide sufficient information about the disease, methods and strategies for surveillance and control, and the pros and cons of various actions, so that producers can make decisions based on knowledge. Subsequently we will conduct another survey to determine further educational needs.

The ILM is working with the CSU Diagnostic Lab to develop the most meaningful and user-friendly testing and reporting methods for Johne's disease testing. We are also collaborating with the State Veterinarian's office to help establish an advisory committee and a certification program that meets the needs of Colorado producers.

The best strategies for dealing with important problems can only be devised on the basis of good information. The challenge for the ILM is to help develop a sound producer knowledge base of information relevant to Colorado dairies. The challenge for producers is to acquire the needed tools to effectively control Johne's disease.