

On the easier side of Johne's

~Nicole Mackinder

A veterinarian's persistence could very well be the saving grace for one northern Michigan dairy herd. Winkel Dairy of McBain, Michigan was unaware Johne's disease could be so detrimental until an increase in the herd's cull rate could no longer be ignored.

"Our veterinarian Dr. Gary Koester encouraged us to begin testing for Johne's but we were afraid to test because we were trying to keep our cow numbers up and didn't want to have to cull the positive cows," remembers Jim Winkel, co-owner of the 700-cow Holstein herd. "In 2000 we realized the increasing number of Johne's clinical cases was causing us to continually lose cows anyway, and we knew we had to do something."

Winkel decided it was time to discuss options with his veterinarian and together designed a Johne's management plan that began with selecting a Johne's test. "We wanted to be sure we were choosing the

best testing option for us personally, so we experimented with all testing methods," states Winkel.

Known for its convenience, Winkel chose the AntelBio Milk ELISA to test the whole herd in April of 2001. Then, deciding the most convenient testing method would be a blood sample at dry-off, Winkel re-tested all milk ELISA positive cows with a blood ELISA. To confirm ELISAs could be used effectively in the herd, the same animals were tested using fecal culture. The result: all cows which tested positive for Johne's in milk also tested positive with the blood ELISA and fecal culture. This confirmed Winkel's confidence in the tests and helped shape his ultimate testing protocol.



"Once it was obvious the testing methods were consistent we started testing with blood at dry-off," states Winkel. "This makes the most sense to us because if she (a cow) is Johne's positive we need to know before she freshens."

Johne's test-positive cows are identified in PCDART and tagged with a green leg band and a green zip strip is attached to their ear tag. "We have several employees and it is imperative that a Johne's

positive cow can be identified easily by anyone who might handle her," states Winkel.

Johne's: Expect the Unexpected

Don't assume...

II Risk Assessment

- Your closed or registered herd doesn't have Johne's
- Your maternity pen is clean enough
- Your calves won't suckle something contaminated before being removed
- Your heifers aren't exposed to cow manure

II Management

- You need to accomplish all suggested changes from your risk assessment
- Your calf management is perfect
- Your staff is sufficiently educated and aware of Johne's control
- Your path to Johne's control will take many years
- Your management changes only benefit Johne's control

II Testing

- The available tests don't work
- You know your disease status, until you test
- Your prevalence will decrease immediately upon implementing your plan
- Your test-positive cows aren't high risks

For more information on Johne's testing and management contact:

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In addition, all Johne's suspect cows are also identified in PCDART and an orange zip strip is attached to their ear tag. Managed much the same as Johne's test-positive cows, suspect cows are those whose dam is Johne's test-positive.

"Identifying and managing Johne's cows is critical to the success of our program," states Winkel. "Once they are identified, our main focus is on preventing disease transmission to the young stock."

In addition to many standard Johne's management practices, Winkel Dairy focuses on preventing disease transmission to young animals by carefully handling feed. To ensure no fecal matter from Johne's test-positive cows is transmitted, feedlot spillage is not fed to calves, and feeding and cleaning equipment is always kept separate.

"Manure management is critical when dealing with Johne's transmission," declares Winkel. "You never know if any

manure has gotten into leftover feed so we just eliminate that risk by getting rid of it."

Perhaps the most aggressive management practice geared toward protecting calves was the purchase of a milk pasteurizer. "In 2002 we began pasteurizing all waste milk fed to calves," states Winkel. "After we began to really learn about how this disease is passed on, we realized if we were going to gain any ground, the calves simply cannot be exposed."

Today the herd has decreased Johne's test-positive prevalence from 4 percent to just less than 1 percent, but there was a time after the Johne's management plan was in place when prevalence actually increased. While often discouraging, an increase in prevalence after a management plan is implemented is not uncommon, as animals are freshening that contracted Johne's before the management protocols were in place.

"A few years into the plan, when our prevalence actually increased, I could have become discouraged, but then I realized how lucky we were to have already started tackling this disease," admits Winkel. "The most important aspect of our Johne's management program is the testing protocol, and I am glad we started testing when we did."

The last five years haven't been easy, but Winkel is grateful his veterinarian never gave up on the Johne's issue. "Thankfully, with the help of Dr. Koester, we were able to design a successful Johne's management plan and regain control of our herd," states Winkel. "I have learned in life that things will usually get harder before they eventually get easier, and Johne's is no different. I am just glad we are now on the easier side of this disease."

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