

## Managing for a healthier, more profitable herd

**Tired of cows dying** from ‘I don’t know disease’, Glen and Dale Phillips decided it was time to take a closer look at disease control in their 80-cow herd.

“The biggest benefit of testing and managing leukosis and Johnes is getting quality heifers back in the herd,” says Dale. “You can’t afford to have these young heifers infected. Besides, how would you go about buying an animal without it (leukosis),” adds Glen.

Due to their concern over where to buy ‘disease-free’ heifers, the Phillips raise all their replacements and to ensure there are enough, began using gender SELECTed™ semen. “We started using sexed semen (gender SELECTed) because we needed more heifers and we couldn’t find quality ones,” says Dale. “Our results have been good. Every pregnancy with sexed semen has resulted in a heifer calf.”

Maximizing return on their investment in genetics is just the start. The

Marlette, Michigan dairymen agree there are economic advantages to managing leukosis. “Heifers calve in healthier, live longer, produce more milk, breed back easier and have fewer overall health problems,” states Dale.

Managing leukosis is paying off on the cow side too. Cows at Phillips Farms are lasting longer. According to their DHI records the average age of the herd has improved by more than four months over the past three years. Additionally, research from a Canadian study supports the idea that leukosis affects a dairy’s bottom line, citing losses due to leukosis at approximately \$610 per year for a 50-cow herd.

“The health problems and expenses with these two diseases (leukosis and Johnes) alone are huge,” remarks Dale.

**“Testing and managing these diseases means better animal health and higher quality milk. When they’re healthy, cows hit the ground running and are ready to produce milk.” – Glen Phillips**

“It’s expensive to try to treat the symptoms and cows just don’t respond,” notes Glen.

With the ultimate goal of eliminating leukosis in the herd, Glen and Dale started reading literature and talking with Dan Grooms, Michigan State University Associate Professor, Department of Large Animal Clinical Sciences, to devise a plan.

“About three to four years ago we started a ‘single use’ needle policy,” says Dale. “That change along with feeding a colostrum replacer offers the greatest advantages for gaining on these diseases.”

## Treating very low worm infection increases milk production

**A recent study** proved that using Eprinex® on cows with very low fecal egg counts for nematode parasites significantly increases milk production for 180-200 days. While previous studies indicate parasites have a negative impact on milk production, this study’s focus was on cows with low worm population rates.

Conducting research on cows with low infection rates was critical as many times low fecal egg counts are missed due to the industry’s reporting standard. Most veterinarians measure eggs per gram when reporting egg counts and while an acceptable method, often low fecal egg counts go unreported. For example, at 0.2 eggs per gram, fecal egg counts are often reported as 0. Additionally using a double centrifuge technique is critical to examine fecal samples, otherwise low infection rates, even 1.9 eggs per gram, can be missed.

In this study, cows with low worm infection rates received Eprinex at calving and experienced an average milk increase of 2.07 pounds per day for 180-200 days of the lactation. That’s over 372 pounds of milk, resulting in more than an additional \$41 (\$11 per hundred weight) in milk revenue alone. The per animal treatment cost of about \$4 per head, is far outweighed by the added revenue in increased milk production.

In addition to increased milk production, Eprinex controls udder and tailhead mange (*Chorioptes bovis*) and offers a six month guarantee for lice. With zero milk and meat withdrawal Eprinex is the proven choice for parasite control in your dairy.

While it may be tempting to eliminate your worming program when milk prices are low or when your infection rate is low, you may end up missing out on revenue. Order Eprinex now and take advantage of special fall discounts. ★



“The real test whether the colostrum replacer is a better choice will be seen in two years,” notes Glen. “We should have a lot cleaner (disease free) cows in the herd.”

Other management practices implemented include: removing calves from the cow immediately after birth; never moving left-over feed from the cow bunk to the heifers; and never using manure handling equipment to feed. To measure the effectiveness of the management practices, the herd is tested regularly for leukosis and Johne’s.

“We monitor disease status by observing the number of sick cows we have,” comments Dale. “If we have a cow start to get sick the first thing we do is check her test results. If she’s positive for leukosis or Johne’s very seldom will we treat her.”

The management steps put in place for disease management are quite simple. “Sure it’s a pain to get use to changing needles, but it’s not hard,” remarks Dale. “Remember when seat belts weren’t mandatory? Now you buckle-up without

thinking about it. It’s just a change in your habits.”

The Phillips began testing for leukosis in 2004 when the AntelBio leukosis milk ELISA was first available. Initial testing revealed disease prevalence of 60 percent. “We used the milk test as soon as it came out,” says Glen. “The milk test is convenient. You can’t beat it.”

The testing protocol includes testing all heifers at freshening and all cows at dry-off with the AntelBio Milk ELISA. “It’s very rare that we get a positive test result back now,” notes Dale.

Indeed, the Phillips herd is making progress. Most recent test results reveal near elimination of Johne’s, as well as a significant reduction in leukosis.

“Testing and managing these diseases means we have better animal health and higher quality milk,” notes Glen. “When they’re healthy, cows hit the ground running and are ready to produce milk.” ★

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– Dale Phillips

## Pre-Payment Savings

NorthStar Cooperative is once again offering a year-end pre-payment opportunity. For every dollar you pre-pay on your NorthStar A.I. Services, DHI Services or AntelBio account prior to December 31, 2006, NorthStar Cooperative will credit your account \$1.03.

By participating in this plan, you will receive an additional 3 percent in buying power with the Cooperative, and there may also be tax advantages. Please consult your tax advisor to determine if there are any additional savings you can earn.

For more information or to make a pre-payment call 1.800.631.3510.

## Milk ELISA closer to official status

AntelBio continues to work on obtaining official status for the Johne’s Milk ELISA. Most recently the data package was submitted to USDA’s Center for Veterinary Biologics to obtain licensure of the kit for interstate distribution. Additionally, USDA’s National Veterinary Services Laboratory (NVSL) has begun work on a national proficiency test for the milk ELISA, which would allow any DHI laboratory to become certified for official Johne’s testing. These most recent developments mean the AntelBio Johne’s Milk ELISA is on the brink of being accepted as an official screening tool in State and National Johne’s Control Programs.



## AntelBio to offer BVD testing

Experimental work at AntelBio to develop BVD testing is nearing completion. Early 2007 plans include the launch of BVD testing including assays for blood, milk and ear notches using both ELISA and PCR technology. While ELISAs will be used to determine an individual animal’s status for persistent infection (PI), the PCR assay, due to its extra sensitivity, will be used for PI confirmation and to determine the presence of infection in larger groups of animals. BVD is a major threat to cattle reproduction, causing abortions and numerous other breeding problems. Furthermore, PI is extremely problematic as cows which shed the virus

their entire lives lead to more cattle being infected. Watch for more information on BVD testing options in early 2007.

