

**JOHNE'S DISEASE CONTROL PROGRAM OFFERS FUNDING FOR EDUCATION,
RISK ASSESSMENT AND HERD MANAGEMENT**
Voluntary Program Provides Free Diagnostic Testing for California Herds

By Michael Payne, DVM, PhD

Johne's Disease (Paratuberculosis) is known as a silent killer of cows and profits on the dairy farm. What many California producers don't know, however, is that the state has a voluntary program that provides funding for education, management and even testing for Johne's Disease – and it's free.

It is estimated that up to 22 percent of all dairy herds in the US have at least 10% of the herd infected with Johne's Disease – at a cost of anywhere from \$75 to upwards of \$180 per cow. About 10 years ago, the federal government recognized the need to address Johne's Disease and implemented a strategic plan to reduce the prevalence of Johne's in US herds. The California Voluntary Johne's Disease Control Program (CVJDCP) grew out of that effort and provides funding for producer participation.

"This program provides valuable information to the dairy producer. Through education and development of a herd management plan, a producer can greatly reduce the risk of Johne's Disease as well as other costly diseases," said Dr. Richard E. Breitmeyer, California State Veterinarian, Department of Food and Agriculture. "I really encourage all dairy producers in California to take advantage of the federal funding that is now available to assist with this important program."

Controlling Johne's Disease on the dairy has numerous benefits. Beyond reducing the potential for infection, taking steps for Johne's Disease mitigation and management also helps reduce common GI disease transmission on the farm for pathogens such as Salmonella, E. coli, cryptosporidia, and rota and corona viruses.

The California Voluntary Johne's Disease Program is made up of three components: Education (Phase I), Management (Phase II), and Herd Testing and Classification (Phase III). Producers can complete any of the three phases but must complete Phases I and II to qualify for free diagnostic testing. All phases are voluntary.

According to Dr. David Ewey of the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) who, along with Dr. Randy Anderson, serves as a statewide Johne's Disease Coordinator, the program is easy to follow, with guidance from a certified veterinarian leading producers through each phase.

Education is the first step (Phase I). Producers contact a certified Johne's veterinarian who will take them through a free training presentation, which consists of an orientation to the basic biology and transmission of Johne's Disease, clinical signs, control and prevention practices. The dairyman then receives an education certificate and can move

to the next step. Following this training, the producer will work with a certified vet to perform a Herd Risk Assessment and will develop a Herd Management Plan (Phase II).

The risk assessment entails a comprehensive evaluation of the animals, facilities and management practices on the dairy with a specific focus on identifying areas of vulnerability to Johne's Disease introduction or transmission. Working with the vet, the producer will put together a plan for the management practices that will be implemented on the dairy to mitigate identified risks. The CVJDCP provides a detailed workbook that guides veterinarians and producers in completing this plan, which is then submitted to Drs. Ewey or Anderson.

"These management plans are focused on realistic practices, agreed to by the producer, that they can implement and will address the specific goals identified in the risk assessment," said Ewey, who is a Veterinary Medical Officer for the USDA. "Working with certified veterinarians is key because they can identify the steps necessary to each unique dairy and its situation."

After the plan has been reviewed, the producer receives a certificate for having completed the second phase and qualifies for subsidized (free) herd testing.

Subsidized testing typically involves sampling either a subset of the herd (10% of the herd or 60 head over 2 years of age, whichever is higher) or the whole herd with a screening test (ELISA blood test). Free fecal testing can be performed to confirm disease status in any cow that tests suspicious or positive on the screening ELISA. Testing results are confidential.

Taking a step further, a producer can enter Phase III, which involves classification of the herd as positive or negative for the existence of Johne's Disease. For Phase III a producer must either test a subset of the herd (as described above), the whole herd, or have environmental sampling, which involves sampling fecal areas of the farm, done. Once this is complete, the herd is classified as either Positive or Negative. Advancement to Phase III is voluntary and a producer's decision – a CVJDCP certified veterinarian can provide details on requirements associated with this phase of the program. Classification status really comes into play on a national level with people looking to purchase replacement cows where a low risk certification can be used as a marketing tool.

For dairyman and cheesemaker John Fiscalini – who serves as co-chair of the Johne's Advisory Group and has completed all three phases of the program – it is a win-only proposition. In taking steps for Johne's Disease mitigation and management, he also is helping to reduce other diseases that are transmitted via the oral-fecal route that affect herd health, and in the long run, the bottom line.

"It makes good overall sense to participate in this program because it provides for positive on-farm practices that benefit far beyond Johne's control and prevention," said Fiscalini. "With a mitigation plan in place, I have reduced the risk of exposure and

infection by calves while also reducing the risk of other diseases. Being proactive about implementing good management practices increases the health of my entire herd.”

The producer-driven CVJDCP is voluntary and dairymen can choose their level of involvement. Funding, however, will unlikely last forever. Interested producers can contact certified veterinarians directly – a list is available on the CDFA Web site at www.cdfa.ca.gov/ahfss/ah/johnes_info.htm or on the California Dairy Quality Assurance Program (CDQAP) Web site at www.cdqa.org/johnesdiseasecontrol - or they can call their area CDFA District Office (see phone numbers below) for details. Currently 180 California veterinarians are certified to provide these services.

“The program takes producers step-by-step through the process and provides funding to offset expenses,” said Dr. Anderson. “We encourage all California dairy producers to take advantage of this opportunity while it is available.”

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