Dairymen asked to cooperate in Johne's study

UNIVERSITY PARK — Johne's disease. How common is it? How can we develop faster, more accurate tests to diagnose it? What is its economic impact on the dairy industry in Pennsylvania? These are some of the questions that a team of researchers now studying Johne's disease are hoping to answer. They are working on a Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture-funded project being conducted by the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine and The Penn State Veterinary Science Department.

During the first year of the project, a survey is being made of cull dairy cows at time of slaughter. Cattle to be studied are chosen at random. Blood, tissue and fecal samples are taken from each animal selected, and identification is recorded. These cattle come from all over the northeastern United States.

The owner of each Pennsylvania cow that is sampled will receive a letter explaining the project and a questionnaire concerning his management practices and herd conditions. Since these questionnaries are being sent to the owners of every Pennsylvania cow sampled whether positive or negative for Johne's, a large number of dairymen — about 500 — will be receiving them. Accurate answers to the questionnaire will be important in determining the economic affect of the disease and the factors that contribute to its spread and survival.

The owner of a cow that tests positive for Johne's will also be contacted by the Bureau of Animal Industries to inform the farmer of the findings and to give him their recommendations. The finding of a positive Johne's cow at slaughter will not affect the herd status of the source herd or the eligiblity for health charts since the positive animal has been slaughtered.

During the second and third year of the three-year project, dairymen will be asked to cooperate in on-farm studies.

Johne's disease is a contagious, intestinal disease which affects cattle, sheep, goats and deer but not humans. It is caused by a bacterium, Mycrobacterium paratuberculosis. In its severe form, it causes watery diarrhea that does not respond to treatment and eventually leads to weight loss and death. It is believed that even those cattle that are infected and do not develop the more severe form may have lower milk production, poorer reproductive efficiency, and higher incidence of mastitis than noninfected cows. All of these problems contribute to the economic significance of the disease. The prevalence of Johne's disease in dairy cows is estimated to be between five and twenty percent.

The most accurate test for the disease in the live animal is a fecal culture. A culture takes 3 to 5 months to get results. For a farmer who is trying to eliminate Johne's disease from his herd, this can be a long wait. The blood tests which are now available, while much more rapid, are not accurate enough to be used to determine the status of an individual animal.

Project researchers, with the cooperation of [illegible] dairymen, hope to assess the number of Pennsylvania dairy cows infected with Johne's disease and its economic impact. As part of this project, faster, more accurate diagnostic methods are also being developed. Once it is determined exactly where we stand with Johne's, we will be much closer to controlling its spread and reducing the resultant losses to Pennsylvania dairymen.

Rabbit conference to be held

DENTON, Md — In response to interest in rabbit production for meat, a "Tri-State Rabbit Conference and Trade Show" will be held in Maryland on Saturday, March 17.

Aimed to appeal to existing domestic rabbit producers and those thinking of entering the business, the conference will feature workshops on such topics as behavior as a management tool, economics of rabbit production and housing and environmental requirements.

A trade show featuring the latest equipment, feeds, financing and electronic record-keeping for the business will be held throughout the day. There will also be a special demonstration on the evaluation of live rabbits and dressed carcasses.

The meeting is open to all interested persons from Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Virginia and neighboring states.

Registration will begin at 9 a.m with a $3 fee set to cover expenses incurred from a special luncheon that will include various rabbit dishes All payments are to be made at the door.

Those wishing to register in advance or in need of further information should contact either Jack Frey of the Maryland Department of Agriculture, 50 Harry S. Truman Parkway, Annapolis, Md. 21401 (telephone 301-841-5770) or Wayne Porter, Route 1, Box 274, Federalsburg, Md. 21632 (telephone: 301-754-9520). Pre-registration is required.

The rabbit conference and trade show will be held on the grounds of the Caroline County (MD) 4-H Park, which is east of Denton off Route 404 at Route 16 and Detour Road

Joining together to put on the conference and trade show are representatives from the Maryland Department of Agriculture, Marketing Services, Caroline County Extension Office and Delmarva Rabbit Growers Association.

Hesston reports profit

HESSTON, Ks. — A program of cost reduction, including factory consolidations to cope with a depressed farm equipment market and the sale of its French subsidiary, has resulted in a profit for Hesston Corporation for the 1983 year ending Dec. 1.

The farm equipment company reported a profit of $2,028,000, or $.27 cents a share, assuming no dilution, on sales of $197,962,000 This compared to a loss in 1982 of $4,238,000 on sales of $202,081,000 from continuing operations, excluding the results of its French subsidiary, Hesston S.A., which was sold in November 1982 to Ditta Pietro Laverda S.p.A., a subsidiary of Fiat Trattori. The 1982 consolidated loss including the results of the French subsidiary was $7,947,000, or $2.69 per share, on consolidated sales of $254,417,000.