

The Silent Enemy

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death although it continues to feed. There is no cure for Johnes.

What makes this disease so frightening is that it is incurable, hard to detect and spreads years before the clinical symptoms surface. Young stock are most susceptible to this insidious disease. Generally calves are exposed to and become infected in the first few weeks of life, but may not develop clinical signs of weight loss or diarrhea for two to eight years. Animals remain susceptible to the disease until they reach 1-year-old.

The Johnes organism is spread primarily through the ingestion of fecal matter. Separating adult animals from calves is critical to halting the spread of Johnes. Also, calves must be taken from mothers are birth to prevent the possibility of fecal intake.

The infected animals may carry the disease for several years and shed the organisms which spread the disease through the herd. But not until the stress of a second or third freshening brings out the visible symptoms will the Johnes diseases be suspected. Any animal with diarrhea should be immedi-

ately isolated from the entire herd.

"The buyer doesn't have a good way of protecting himself. But I strongly suggest the dairy farmer isolates all new purchases and have each one tested for Johnes," said Hutchinson. It takes 3-4 months to get the results and it may be extra work, but compared to the potential loss from Johnes it is well worth it. Johnes is the most economically important disease for southeastern farmers."

The economic losses mount up:

- decreased milk production
- increased susceptibility to other diseases
- loss of genetic potential
- loss of export market
- increased medical costs
- weight loss at slaughter
- loss at auction sales if animals have a statement that says exposed to Johnes disease (Johnes is a reportable disease to the Bureau of Animal Industry). Also, the average difference in body weight between a Johnes positive animal and a Johnes free animal is approximately 110 pounds.

Infected animals shed the organisms in fecal matter. The organisms may survive for many months

and in some cases for years in the environment. The major source of infection to cattle is through direct fecal contamination of feedstuffs. It is important to take these necessary precautions:

- separate calves from dams at birth
- house all young stock separately from older cows
- prevent fecal contamination from feeds
- keep new animals separate from herd until they have been tested and certified free of Johnes (this becomes easier with the new test soon to be available)
- discourage visitors from entering feed rooms and feed alleys unless boots are washed and disinfected
- protect the herd from rodents, birds and pets which travel from neighboring farms
- do not mix replacement animals with the adult herd until they are at least two-years-old.
- keep feeding bunks well-above ground to minimize fecal contamination
- do not spread manure on permanent pasture used for grazing cattle
- protect young cattle from all waste water and drainage that may come from areas occupied by adult animals

•fence off or fill in any stagnant water source and allow cattle to drink from only tanks or free flowing stream

What does this mean for area dairy farmers.

"If I were buying any dairy animals or stock, I would not buy from a non-certified herd," said Dr. Brian K. Reed, D.V.M., of Hutchison & Trayer Veterinary Associates in Denver. "Those farmers who have their herd certified negative for Johnes will be the leaders in the industry."

At present certification is a slow-process. There is a waiting line to get on the state program and the test results are slow in coming. However, it is a place to begin. Starting now will give that farmer an edge not only when the test results do come in and they are negative, but it is of greater importance if the tests show even one animal positive. For the purebred breeder the losses can be devastating.

"The Pennsylvania indemnity program will pay the farmer only if his herd is on the state testing program, if a technician appraises the worth of the animal, and the animals which test positive are sent to

the slaughter house within 30 days from tests results," said Hutchinson. "Last year the state paid out \$125,000 in indemnity money."

The indemnity payment falls far short of the worth of a registered, high-indexed, good pedigreed animal. Working on preventing the spread are breed associations, Pennsylvania Farmers Association, Pennsylvania Grange and other farmers groups across the state are working with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture and the Bureau of Animal Industry on a testing plan.

Under this plan, specific and strict requirements must be met for a dairymen to earn a Johnes free certificate. This plan could be in effect by the end of 1988. It would be voluntary.

Formulating and putting into operation an accrediting plan for Johnes is and will be a slow process. Until the time when breeders can display their Johnes free certificate and potential buyers can be reasonably assured they are bringing Johnes free cows onto their farm, precautions should be taken to prevent the spread of this destructive disease. A dairymen's milking herd is too much to lose.

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