



Buyer beware: Johne's-positive cows showing up

By Ann Godkin

When an Ontario dairy producer tested his herd in 2010, he discovered 20 of the 30 animals purchased the previous year from a cattle dealer were positive for Johne's disease. Another producer, whose full herd had tested negatively for Johne's last year, was surprised to learn he now had two positive cows when his latest results came back. His vet found the positive animals were two of three recently purchased cows.

These are just two stories that have come to light as more herds are tested under the Ontario Johne's Education and Management Assistance Program. While few herd owners want to pass Johne's on to fellow producers, these examples of purchased positive cows should make all cattle buyers cautious.

As well as this anecdotal evidence, research has documented the need for caution to prevent introducing *Mycobacterium Avium Paratuberculosis* (MAP), the organism that

causes Johne's, into your herd. Work by the University of Guelph's Dr. Ulrike Sorge in Ontario and Western Canadian herds showed owners who bought cattle were more likely to end up with test-positive cows and more of them.

Thanks to readily available tests and the Ontario Johne's program, more cows are being checked for infections. This means more Johne's test-positives likely are for sale. Even though removing positive cows is not always recommended in tested herds, a cow with a positive Johne's test has one more strike against her when culling decisions are made.

Most herd owners do the right thing, and attempt to steer even a healthy looking test-positive cow away from the dairy ring. Once the cow leaves the farm, however, her former owner loses control of the animal's fate. When milk demand is high, a test-positive dairy cow that appears healthy is unlikely to be sold in the beef ring—no matter what her original consigner wanted.

Many MAP-infected cows, with or

without positive tests, appear healthy and can end up in a sale. Although most of these cows never show Johne's disease symptoms, they can be shedding contagious MAP bacteria in their manure, colostrum and milk.

Johne's test-positive cows are known to have lower milk production, and a higher rate of health and performance issues. It's likely they are often culled sooner than uninfected cows, even when the owner doesn't know they have Johne's because the herd hasn't been tested. Untested cows should be considered MAP-infected unless they come from a herd that has a proven low prevalence of test-positive cows.

Sellers should take note, too. When a purchased calf or heifer tests positive for Johne's in someone else's herd—even years later—her herd prefix identifies where the infection likely started.

To protect your herd, develop a purchasing plan to reduce the risk as much as possible. Pre-purchase testing of individual animals is an unreliable indicator of their health status. Before buying a cow, you need proof of the seller's whole-herd Johne's status. A single herd test won't reveal the full Johne's picture either. Only a series of negative whole-herd tests and a history of limited cattle purchases reduces the probability of MAP-infected cattle in the seller's herd. Purchasing embryos is also low risk, provided the embryos go into low risk recipients in the home herd.

Use a buyer-beware approach when purchasing cattle. Each producer is responsible for making good choices about buying and selling to protect their herd's health, that of other herds and the investment by the whole province in the Ontario Johne's program.

NOTICE: To keep Ontario dairy producers and other industry sectors informed, Dairy Farmers of Ontario publishes changes to its regulations. Complete regulations are available on DFO's website at www.milk.org.

DFO Regulation 05/11 replaces DFO Regulation 04/11 and was made to adjust the price of Special Milk Classes as a result of a CDC announcement, effective April 1, 2011 as follows:

Class	Butterfat (\$/kg)		Protein (\$/kg)		Other Solids (\$/kg)	
	New	Old	New	Old	New	Old
5(a)	5.0005	4.4342	5.2643	4.6418	0.5189	0.4525
5(b)	5.0005	4.4342	2.5975	2.3537	2.5975	2.3537
5(c)	5.1472	4.9096	2.5975	2.3537	2.5975	1.3537

Bill Emmott Chair

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