

June 2018 Newsletter



Johne's Disease seems to be the most troubling re-emerging disease we see within the industry currently; affecting cattle, sheep and goats. The process of disease makes it extremely challenging to both diagnose and control. Johne's Disease is caused by a bacteria, *Mycobacterium avium ssp. paratuberculosis* (MAP). Animals are generally infected as new-borns but do not generally develop clinical signs until 2-3 years or older. MAP is an 'intracellular' bacteria; this allows it to lie dormant in the cells of the gut without detection by the immune system. At this point the lack of immune response to infection makes diagnosis near impossible. We are unable to detect antibodies as none are produced and no bacteria are shed in faeces in this dormant state. It is not until the disease is starting to develop that we are able to begin detecting antibodies and bacteria.

The classical clinical signs of Johne's disease are weight loss and scour. The scour can be intermittent or as is often the case in sheep and goats, completely absent. Disease can progress slowly or can be reasonably dramatic with cows rapidly progressing to death after a short period of scouring.

Control of the disease is tricky but it tends to revolve around protection of the susceptible calf from contamination with infectious faeces and or colostrum. In order to achieve this we need to know the disease status of the dam. In dairy cattle this can be monitored through quarterly milk antibody samples in the hope that a rising blood antibody level will be detected prior to drying off and appropriate management put in place to protect her calf and others being born at the same time. Seasonally calving suckler cows can be blood tested around weaning in order to achieve similar control.

'Action Johne's' and the National Johne's Management Plan (NJMP) is an Industry led initiative, aimed at bringing together stakeholders in the Dairy Industry to formulate a standardised plan for herds to follow that is put together by the farms veterinary surgeon. Many of the milk buyers are now signed up including Arla, Muller and Omsco. If you supply these dairies then by 31st October 2018 you are expected to have undertaken to assess your Johne's risks and herd status and, put in place the necessary management information, equipment, husbandry and resources to implement the agreed control strategy. All of our vets are approved by the NJMP to assess your risks and formulate a control plan. Please get in touch in good time to get this done as we will need to do some diagnostic tests if you are not already testing and can only write a plan when we have these results.

Even if you are not a supplier to one of the dairies participating in NJMP, or you are Beef/Sheep producer I would still urge you to know and manage your Johne's disease risks and find out your disease status. It is often too late when the disease is established to manage your way out without some really tough decisions.