

# Report on 2020

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**A**t the end of 2020, there were 1,759 herds, including 10 beef herds, registered in the Irish Johne's Control Programme. 137 new herds registered during 2020, while 39 withdrew, giving a nett increase of 98 herds. Although COVID-19 distractions were likely a factor, this level of recruitment is well below expectations and budget.

Like 2019, completions of the annual requirements of whole herd test (WHT) and veterinary risk assessment and management plan (VRAMP) were concentrated to the last few months of the year, and an extension until the end of January was approved to enable late completions to be recognised. 1,302 dairy herds (75%) completed both their WHT and VRAMP.

Two significant concerns during 2020 related firstly to registered herds failing to complete both their WHT and VRAMP; and, secondly, animals with positive or inconclusive results to an ELISA test not being tested by PCR on dung samples as required. Herds with an incomplete WHT and/or VRAMP do not meet the processors' conditions for payment of herd testing assistance; and animals without the required PCR test are considered to be infected, and therefore the herd is also considered infected, without this actually being confirmed through PCR testing. Owners are urged to contact their veterinary practitioner to arrange completion of these requirements in 2021.



IRISH JOHNE'S CONTROL PROGRAMME

Animal Health Ireland, 2-5 The Archways, Carrick-on-Shannon, Co. Leitrim, N41 WN27



There were 222,000 ELISA tests conducted, split 50:50 between blood and milk, with 8,295 (3.7%) results of positive or inconclusive. There were 5,347 PCR tests, with 271 (5.1%) of tests (not herds) being positive.

The number or proportion of herds in the programme that are truly infected cannot be calculated, due to the large number of herds (706) that have had an animal with a positive or inconclusive ELISA result without an ancillary PCR (dung) test. However, the data appears to support previous surveys that estimate the herd prevalence in Ireland at around 30%. This is important information, as one of the objectives of the programme is to provide herds with no evidence of Johne's infection (estimated to be 70% of Irish dairy herds) to protect themselves from becoming infected, in contrast to most EU dairying countries where the proportion of infected herds is much higher.

For the estimated 30% of herds that are infected, the programme's tools help to control the spread and impacts of infection within the herd. Both of these objectives (protecting a negative status or controlling infection) are cost-effectively addressed by the testing and VRAMP protocols of the programme.

Late in 2020, DAFM began contacting dairy farmers to inform them of positive Johne's results from retrospective testing of bulk tank milk samples undertaken as part a national surveillance programme. Farmers should not be unduly concerned if they receive such a report. However, they should recognise the result as being very suggestive of infection being present, contact Animal Health Ireland and register with the IJCP. They can then to make use of the programme funds for testing to confirm infection and identify high-risk animals, and for the VRAMP to put measures in place to minimise spread and level of disease.

Planned face-to-face training and awareness activities were postponed during 2020 due to COVID restrictions, although the programme trialled podcasting, a video, on-line meetings and a Facebook group, in addition to monthly updates, to share information. We will broaden use of these channels in 2021.

The IJCP will continue to improve during 2021, by enhancing the VRAMP, improving scheduling of tests, and implementing an assurance tool. The programme offers opportunities for all herds, dairy and beef, to benefit from Johne's control for better animal health and welfare, productivity, reduced carbon footprint and reduced use of antibiotics. We aim to provide these services to more herds in 2021.