



Johne's Control

Animal Health Ireland.ie

Farmer A - Johne's Disease Case Study

The farmers in this case study are based in Meath and are dual suppliers to both Glanbia and Lakelands. Their farm has a split calving pattern with over 80% of the herd calved in the spring. The herd is predominantly Holstein Friesian.

In the late 1990s, there was a significant problem with TB on the farm. Replacement stock was sourced outside of Ireland and within a 3 year period the entire herd of 180 milking cows was replaced by imported stock due to the continuing TB problem. By the early 2000s they began to see sick animals which were scouring and becoming thin. The veterinary advice at the time was to investigate their parasite control plan as Johne's Disease was rare with very little was known about it. Over several spring calving seasons sick animals were put into a straw bedded shed with the cows that were calving. They know now that this only served to multiply and compound their problem further.

In 2005 they became involved in a pilot DAFM programme. In the first round of testing they had in excess of 60 animals positive on blood tests – almost 40% of the herd. On average, they culled 25 clinical cases each year. As part of the programme two blood tests were taken per year with random faecal sampling every two years. Compensation was paid for all animals culled helping them to tackle the problem. At the time it was estimated that Johne's Disease was costing them between €20,000/€30,000 each year.

Being involved in the programme enabled them to understand and learn about the disease and how to tackle it. They are indebted to the advice they received from the local DVO and DAFM vets and their assistance in helping to set up protocols to tackle the disease. They consulted them when making infrastructural changes on the farm including the advice to build individual calving and calf pens.

Since 2005 they have continued to tackle Johne's Disease on their farm. They have grown their herd from 180 cows to over 400 cows today. They continue to work closely with their own vet and recognise the need to continue to learn how to improve their farming practices to manage Johne's Disease.

They joined the AHI Johne's Disease voluntary programme from the start in 2014. They have further enhanced their farming practices as a result of the on-farm risk assessment. They continue to calve all their cows in individual pens and these pens are washed out and disinfected after each calving. Each new-born calf is given two feeds of colostrum from their own dam or from a test negative cow before moving them on to milk replacer. No slurry is spread on the calf grazing area.

Despite the changes they have made they recognise that there is more they can do particularly around their protocols for calving. This year, they concentrated on snatching calves within 10 minutes of birth and monitored all the calvings to ensure this was achieved. The apparent herd prevalence has gone from 40% when they first started on their journey to manage the disease to an apparent herd prevalence today of 2% with no clinical cases. They hope snatching the calves at birth will completely remove the infection from their herd. However they recognise that it will be some years before they have a high confidence that they no longer have the infection in their herd.

Working with their vet, since 2015 their annual blood test for JD is now taken in December. This allows them to identify all the positive cows before calving. These animals are isolated and they cull the heifer calves from all positive cows with high readings. These cows are then subsequently culled. In order to quickly remove these animals from their herd, they do not routinely undertake faecal testing. Since they began to tackle the disease on their farm, they have seen improved fertility and a significant reduction in the use of antibiotics on the farm with a general improvement in the health of the herd.

When asked would they encourage other farmers into the Johne's Disease pilot programme, they said they would. They believe that every farmer should know their infection status. They would like to see a national programme with compulsory testing as they feel that this is in the best interests of Irish farmers. They highlight the importance of farmers tackling the disease before it becomes too widespread in their herds. They also believe that farmers in the programme should be formally recognised.

These farmers' experience is that managing Johne's Disease is challenging, with the information that is now available and the advice available on good farming practice, it is easier to tackle the disease now than when they started. Their experience of reducing the prevalence of infection from 40% to 2% is testimony that, with dedication and attention to detail, Johne's Disease can be controlled on Irish farms.