

# Making the most of the VRAMP

Lawrence Gavey, Johne's disease Programme Manager

**T**he veterinary risk assessment and management plan (VRAMP) is an annual requirement for the Irish Johne's Control Programme (IJCP), but it has relevance to all livestock owners in Ireland.

The VRAMP provides an opportunity to systematically identify and reduce the risks of Johne's disease; specifically its incidence, impact and costs to the farm.

Remember that 'risk' involves two factors: the likelihood of an adverse event, and the consequence of that adverse event. Managing disease risk involves assessment and mitigation of both factors, prioritising these factors as high, medium or low, and responding as appropriate to the farm's needs.

The VRAMP process is designed to identify disease threats and incidents, how they may enter or have already entered a farm or spread within a farm, how those threats may change over time, and what actions may be feasible and effective in stopping or reducing the spread and effects of infection.

The IJCP VRAMP was modelled on similar Johne's control programmes in other jurisdictions, most notably Canada and the USA, and a similar approach has also been adopted in many European countries, including Northern Ireland and Great Britain.

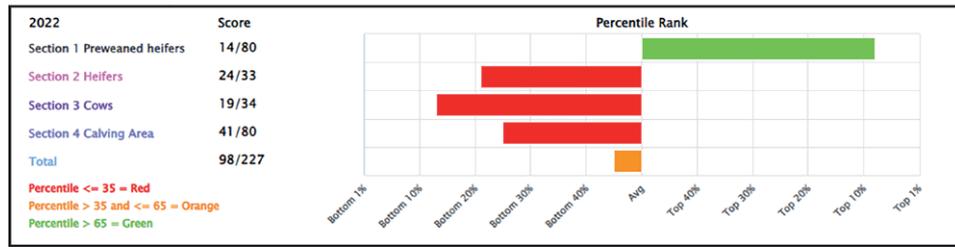
The Johne's programme requires and supports the VRAMP through training approved veterinary practitioners (AVPs), having template questionnaires to guide the assessment and planning, funding your preferred AVP to undertake the on-farm VRAMP with you, and providing an analysis of VRAMP performance.

That some farms' experience with VRAMPs has been more a box-ticking exercise than a thoughtful analysis is a missed opportunity, but you can make better use of the next VRAMP. Allocate sufficient time, up to two hours, for a detailed assessment. Look at test results; the prior and current potential routes of entry of infection to your farm (primarily through entry of livestock, so aim to keep a closed herd); and of the opportunities for faecal-oral spread within the herd (especially, but not only, from adult cattle to young calves). Removal of test-positive animals from the herd, and attention to good hygiene of cows, calving pens, calf-rearing facilities and heifer pastures are important factors.

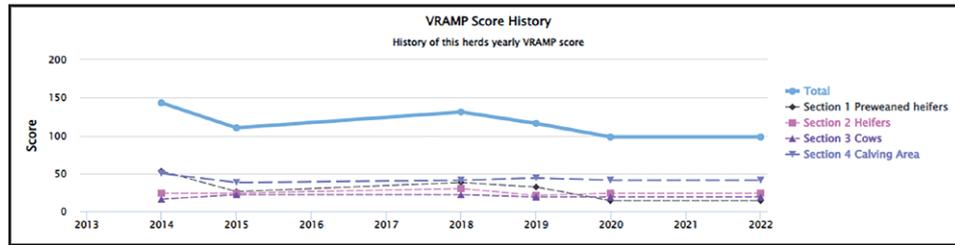
There have been two recent enhancements to the VRAMP. Firstly, you can now see how the farm's VRAMP scores have been tracking over time, and how these scores compare to other herds in the programme (Figure 1). This analysis is available by downloading the Herd Johne's Summary Report from the herd status screen on ICBF. You and your AVP can use this analysis to pinpoint areas that may be lagging behind average and may be the most cost-effective to tackle.

7. VRAMP

Most recent recorded scores and benchmarking (percentile ranking<sup>10</sup>):



Trend - scores: (Note: Lower score = better management and lower risk)



Trend - benchmarking (percentile rank): (Note: Higher rank = better performance relative to other herds)

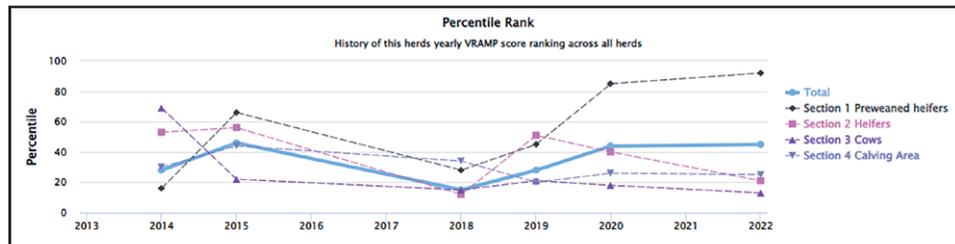


Figure 1. Extract of VRAMP score analysis from example of Herd Johne's Summary Report

The second enhancement is the provision to the AVPs of a guide to drafting the recommended actions or interventions that make up the final part of the VRAMP. This guide offers suggestions of generic actions and also emphasises that the recommendations should be *Specific* (clear to the user), *Measurable* (so you can assess progress or completion), *Achievable* (within the resources of the farm), *Relevant* (accepted by the herd owner as priorities of the farm), and *Time-bound* (specified deadline by when the action should be completed) = 'SMART Goals'.

By you and your AVP putting concentrated effort into the VRAMP questionnaire, reviewing animal movements and VRAMP scores, and using the Interventions guide, you can get the most out of your Johne's VRAMP.

The same principles can be applied for those herds undertaking a TASA assessment in response to a positive result to ancillary faecal testing (PCR or culture).

And all herds, whether in the IJCP or not, can apply this model of critical assessment of risk factors and then designing and committing to actions that reduce exposure to, or impact of, those factors when considering any disease threat, such as calf scours, internal and external parasites, mastitis, lameness, BVD, IBR and TB.

We can expect this model to guide the implementation of on-farm biosecurity measures, so engaging constructively now in the VRAMP process through the IJCP will set you up for successfully adopting biosecurity responsibilities as they emerge in the future, consistent with EU and DAFM strategies.