

Get 2023 off to a good start by planning your Whole Herd Test (WHT)

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The planning and completion of your Whole Herd Test (WHT) for 2023 is something which should be done as soon as possible after the herd resumes milking. It is a good idea to get the WHT organised and completed early in the year as it may avoid clashing with the TB test later in the Autumn. In 2022 less than 45% of WHTs were completed at the start of December resulting in unnecessary pressure to get these completed before the end of the programme year. Figure 1 below shows the pattern of how ELISA tests (WHT) are completed over the course of recent programme years. It can be seen that levels of testing build up from May to July and continue at a high level until November. Ideally the more testing that could be completed early in the year the better for organisation of the programme. In terms of Figure 1, a graph showing peak testing early in the Summer rather than running into late Autumn would be preferable.

Key points to note when scheduling your WHT

- 2023 WHT must be at least 180 days after the 2022 WHT commenced.
- WHT must be at least 90 days after TB skin testing.
- Individual animals in your WHT must be at least 7 days after calving.
- Identify all animals in the herd over two years old on the day of the sampling; all of these 'eligible animals' must be tested, with the exception of non-breeding animals that are maintained in a separate holding to the dairy herd.
- Make arrangements for WHT sampling and testing well in advance with your approved veterinary Practitioner (AVP) or milk recording organisation.
- Remember any animals not tested as part of the WHT, for example bulls, dry or cull cows that are not exempt as separate non-breeding cattle must be sampled as part of a sweeper test which should be carried out as soon as possible after the WHT (within 30 days if possible).

After you have completed your WHT and if necessary carried out a sweeper test to include any eligible animals not tested at the WHT it is important to review your results. These should be discussed with your vet and if animals in your herd are determined to require ancillary faecal testing this should be carried out as soon as is practical but certainly within 45 days from the positive or inconclusive ELISA test. It is important that any animals requiring ancillary testing as these animals will be considered test positive until such time as their statuses are resolved and the herd will be considered as an infected herd.

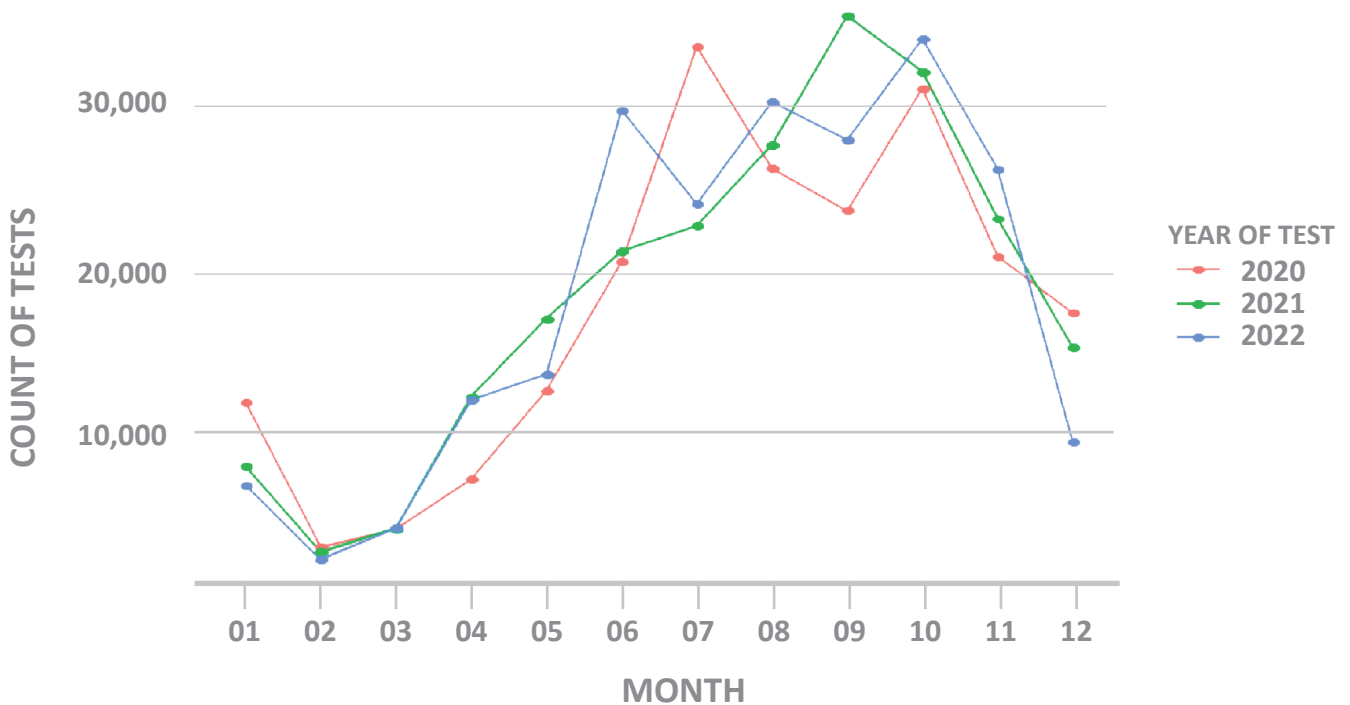


Figure 1. Number of ELISA tests completed per month in the years 2020 to 2022

Less than 40% of VRAMPs were completed by the 1st of December 2022. The pattern of completion for 2022 (Figure 2) is similar to previous years with much of the VRAMP completion activity occurring in the last 2 months of the year. In 2022 366 herds which were in the programme as year 4 test negative pathway herds did not have to complete a VRAMP which is shown in Figure 2 as the 2022 (purple) line not starting from zero in January.

As shown in Figure 2 most VRAMPs are completed close to the end of the year and indeed this is a period where cows are dry leading up to calving on many farms and farmers feel the vet advice is most useful and relevant. It may however be an idea to instead carry out the VRAMP earlier in the programme year, possibly after calving time when a discussion about the effectiveness of the previous year’s recommendations could be held. This might also allow time for any structural changes deemed necessary on a farm to be completed before the next calving season arrives.

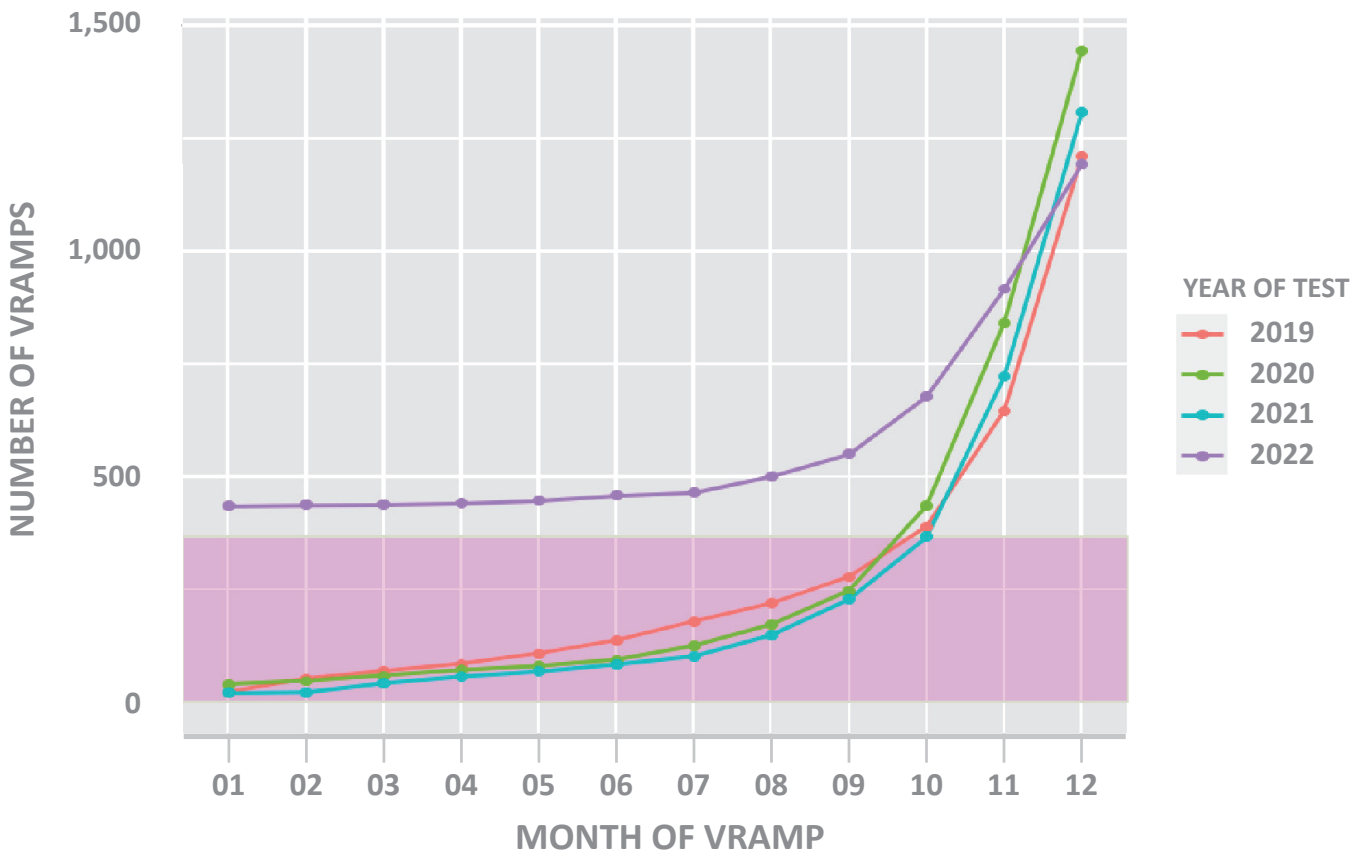


Figure 2. Number of VRAMPs completed per month in the years 2019 to 2022

In summary for 2023 please organise and complete your WHT as early in the year as possible, talk to your vet and organise your VRAMP, maybe as suggested just after calving time and make sure to also carry out any ancillary faecal testing required by the programme.