

News update

SA Dairy ManaJD program

Farmers throughout SA continue to be enthusiastic about the new Dairy ManaJD program, with about 50% of SA dairy herds being tested so far (January 2006), and an expectation that more will enrol during the year.

So far, only thirteen new herds have been diagnosed with BJD which is a prevalence of only 9.8% infected herds in SA - very much lower than interstate figures that may be considerably higher than this.

The Cattle Industry Fund is continuing to support the program in order to prevent the spread of BJD from the dairy industry into the beef sector. Due to the rapid uptake of the program, some funding restrictions may have to be imposed in future, but at this stage the level of subsidy allows most farmers to test for free.

Declaration of the Dairy Assurance Score is required for all sales of dairy cattle in SA, including private sales and trade of crossbred cattle born on dairy farms. This declaration is a simple matter of marking NVD's in section 9 or using the special Declaration forms found in the Dairy ManaJD manuals. During 2006 farmers who have not completed a declaration of the score will be contacted by PIRSA, and expiations will occur. There is a great deal of interest in the beef sector to know the dairy score of crossbred stock, to minimise the risk of BJD.

Costs of BJD:

Many farmers believe BJD does not significantly affect production or financial returns to the farm. However, a recent paper in the British "Veterinary Record" (June 2005) showed infected herds, without control measures in place, may be losing \$50 *per cow in the herd* annually. These losses are largely invisible in terms of reduced milk production in infected cows (but not yet showing symptoms), loss of cows (culled for low production, or clinical signs), vet costs, etc. Other losses *not* included in the paper were lost market access, international trade opportunities, etc.

In America the situation is even worse, with a major study in 2002 showing that farmers were losing up to \$200 (US) per cow in the herd. An estimated 22% or more of US dairy herds are infected, and in those herds prevalence is 10% or more. By comparison, the average SA infected herd has less than 2% disease, and no SA dairies have 10% prevalence.

Both papers recommend that the best way forward in disease control is by improved calf rearing and management, combined with testing to remove infected cattle, and sourcing replacement cattle from low-risk herds.

PIRSA Veterinarian Dr Jack Reddin attended an international conference on Johne's Disease last year and has prepared a report that may be obtained from Flaxley Ag Centre. A number of authors stressed the importance of improved calf rearing and hygiene in the papers as the key to breaking the disease transmission cycle. Johne's Disease is considered to be a major production limiting disease in overseas dairying countries, and human health concerns regarding the suggested link to Crohn's Disease remain a concern although continuing research has not demonstrated a clear link.

Farmers who have not yet tested, or who have questions about the process should contact their own vet, or their nearest PIRSA office.