Bovine Newsletter

December 2011

Johne's Focus Farm Project

During this past year 8 Johne's focus groups were formed in the province of Ontario. The groups were run by veterinarians on behalf of DFO to increase the level of education on Johne's disease amongst dairy producers. This style of education through peer groups was modelled after a project completed in Australia in the last 10 years that showed a very high application rate of the education obtained. The groups started in the spring at the first meeting by attending a focus farm that had been identified by the veterinarian as a farm that was open to investigation by a peer group for recommendations on reducing the risk of Johne's disease transmission. These farms were selected either for their known Johne's status or because they were considering a change in facility or management that impacted an area of concern.

Group members walked the focus farm and completed the Risk Assessment Management Plan (Ramp) form specifically looking at the high risk areas and asking pertinent management questions. Following the farm visit the Ramp was discussed and the risks were ranked by importance and ease of changing. From this the producers then looked at their own farms and compiled a list of common concerns for high risks across the farms present in the group. The second meeting took place at what was considered an example farm that the group identified as doing a good job managing the high risk areas identified in the first meeting. This meeting focused on transition areas and calf feeding practices.

Management of the calf and cow around the time of calving has major implications on the spread of this disease as fecal contamination is the predominant mode of spread. Historically, milk fed from Johne's cows was the prime rate of transmission but as more producers improve colostrum management and switch to milk replacers this risk has been for the most part controlled. The third meeting was a day of farm tours combing 2 or more of the local groups to see other exemplar farms or other group members that had made changes to their risk areas.

Dr. Ken Nordlund from university of Wisconsin was in attendance and spoke with producers one night and with local veterinarians the other night. Dr. Nordlund has several years research and application of transition cow management issues and more recently positive pressure tube ventilation systems. The ventilation systems installed locally into calf nursery areas have had significant impacts on reduction of respiratory disease and scours as air quality is improved.

The final instalment of this group is to meet again and transition new members in to repeat the program with the initial members carrying on to continue to follow up on educational needs on their farms. This group program is designed to look into Johne's disease risk management but as we saw in the first group, can turn into a way to investigate any issues the group members find interest in.

If interested please contact the office, or Reg to sign up. First meeting will take place in January 2012.

Cold Weather Calf Care - A Checklist

Dr. Sam Leadly, Calf and Heifer Management Specialist of the Attica Vet Association (New York) suggests producers take a good look at their calf care before the cold weather hits.

Consider your cold weather calf care procedures, and compare your actions to the standards in this checklist. Are the following completed: almost always, usually, often, seldom or never?

If you have questions please contact your herd health veterinarian. We would be happy to discuss your calf care protocols with you!

this hutch is well bedded - you can't see the calf's legs when she lays down

1. I feed all calves at least 4L of clean, high quality colostrum no later than 6 hours after birth.

2. For calves on a primary milk diet, I provide enough milk or milk replacer appropriate to the environmental temperature to provide enough energy for both maintenance and at least one pound per day of growth.

3. For calves on a milk and starter diet, I provide free-choice calf starter.

4. I provide free choice water for all calves in both freezing and non-freezing weather.

5. During cold weather, I dry hair coats at birth enough to fluff in order to reduce evaporation heat losses.

6. During cold weather in calf barns, I provide adequate air exchanges (15 cfm/min/calf) without creating drafts on individual calves.

7. In cold weather housing, I keep an adequate layer of dry bedding underneath calves to insulate them from a cold base. [*Remember, however, much of the insulation value of bedding is lost when it is wet. Wet bedding can have three times the heat loss as dry bedding.*]

8. In cold weather housing, I control convection losses either by adequate soft bedding to allow "nesting" or by the use of calf blankets.