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Program takes aim at debilitating Johne's disease in calves

A program to reduce the risk of debilitating Johne's disease in reared dairy calves has been introduced in NSW by the Department of Primary Industries (DPI).

The Johne's Disease Calf Accreditation Program (JDCAP), is designed to minimise the risk of bovine Johne's disease bacteria spreading from adult cattle to replacement calves, reared within a dairy herd.

DPI Cattle Health Coordinator, Dr Graham Bailey, said the program was introduced to help manage this bacterial disease with a dedicated farm plan.

"Hygienic calf rearing minimises the risk of spread of infection. The program provides assurance that calves are protected from this wasting disease, which causes a thickening of the intestinal wall and consequently blocks the normal absorption of food," Dr Bailey said.

"It is a long term program requiring commitment from everyone on the farm involved with calf and heifer rearing.

"Farmers need to consult with their vet and establish a set of procedures for the rearing of replacement calves, document the steps taken and monitor the program on an ongoing basis.

"Protecting calves from exposure to this disease also minimises spread of other infections and results in healthier calves."

NSW Dairy farmers participating in the JDCAP will be able to claim extra points in the Dairy Bovine Johne's disease assurance score (DAS).

The program is currently operating in Victoria, and has been adapted for NSW with assistance by the veterinary profession and dairy industry organisations.

It is supported by NSW Dairy Farmers Committee, Dairy Connect, Dairy Australia, and the Australian Veterinary Association.

Bovine Johne's disease is caused by bacteria (*Mycobacterium paratuberculosis*) that live mainly in animal intestines but can also survive in the outside environment for several months.

Calves from birth to 12 months of age are most prone to become infected if exposed to the bacteria.

The disease can be spread from infected cattle to young calves through drinking contaminated milk, by being swallowed, across the placenta or by the ingestion of feed, pasture or contaminated water.

For more information please visit:

<http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/agriculture/livestock/health/images/information-by-species/cattle/jdcap>

Media contact: Anne Brook (02) 6763 1163 or 0477 358 305



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