



Vet Steve Borsberry, from the Solihull-based 608 XLVet Group in the West Midlands, shares some tips on disease prevention and tackling health problems in dairy herds, drawing from his many years of on-farm experience. Here he takes a look at an insidious disease that's extremely difficult to control.

Steve Borsberry: "Monitoring is key to controlling wasting disease"

## Silent and deadly

**T**here's no such thing as a 'Johne's free' herd – the closest you can get is monitored low prevalence for the disease. That's how difficult this disease is to diagnose and control. And there's no cure and no treatment.

It's a silent, insidious disease – cattle can carry it and pass it to their calves, through their colostrum and faeces, without showing any symptoms themselves.

Because sub-clinical carriers are difficult to detect by eye, regular monitoring is a vital part of any plan to control the disease. Individual milk or blood tests can then be used to seek out cattle that are shedding the organism. But remember that an animal that tests negative one month could test positive the following month. Negative animals should be considered future positives in high prevalence Johne's herds. All animals over two years old – including any stock bulls – should be included in the regular monitoring programme. Johne's is usually picked

up around birth but has a long incubation period – so it may be two and six years before any clinical signs are observed if they are seen at all.

Feeding calves pooled colostrum is a no no, unless it is from repeat test negative cows or is pasteurised as this will reduce the risk of disease transmission. And producers should be aware that calving yards can also be a reservoir for Johne's disease. Faecal contamination of bedding and cows' teats can all infect calves too, which means that good hygiene at and around calving are all the more important to avoid storing up trouble a few years down the line.

It's also important to keep a close eye on the calving cows at this time, as cows may become clinical during a period of stress, such as calving.

Avoid buying in the disease and take care when buying stock from dispersal sales – find out about the herd's disease history and status or ask your vet to do this for you. And beware of any herd that claims to be 'Johne's-free'.



### The encyclopaedia **Johne's disease**

#### Cause

A bacterium called *Mycobacterium avium* subspecies *paratuberculosis* (Map).

#### Symptoms

Sub-clinical signs include milk loss and increased susceptibility to other diseases, including lameness and mastitis. After the long incubation period, the main clinical signs seen in infected animals are profuse, watery diarrhoea, severe weight loss and, sometimes, intermittent fever. Johne's infected cows continue to eat even with severe diarrhoea.

#### Diagnosis

Individual milk or blood testing should be used to establish herd prevalence and repeat testing will enable producers to pick up cows as they become positive or move toward clinical disease.

#### Prevention

Only buy stock from herds with a known disease history. Regular monitoring, individual tests where necessary, and good hygiene at and around calving are vital to prevent and minimise its spread.

Culling clinical cows and vaccinating the whole herd against the disease are other options but they are not quick fixes.

Vaccination is a last resort for heavily infected herds. Any actions must be discussed with a vet and form part of a thorough Johne's monitoring and prevention plan.

