

New goals set for Johne's control in UK herds

Johne's scheme gathers momentum

Half of GB dairy herds are estimated to be monitoring Johne's disease. Dairy UK – as co-ordinator of the Action Group on Johne's – hopes that milk processor data will show that many more have an appropriate control plan in place. Phase two of the national control plan, once approved, will add more momentum.

text **Karen Wright**

With most milk buyers supporting the National Action Group for Johne's disease control initiatives, Dairy UK is optimistic that a growing proportion of British dairy herds will have some sort of Johne's control plan in place.

"We hope that these herds are testing for Johne's disease," says Dairy UK's policy and sustainability director Peter Dawson. "And that the results from the tests are being translated into actions and are being regularly monitored. This was the target for phase one of the Action Group's control plan."

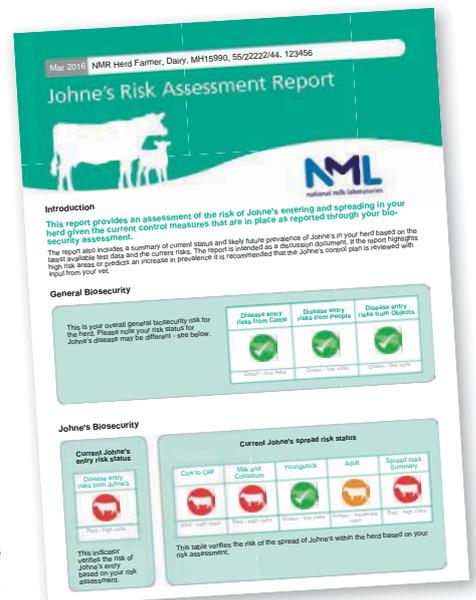
The Action Group also set out six Johne's control options – or strategies – in 2015 as part of phase one. From these,

producers and their vets can select the one that best fits their circumstances and will form the basis of their control plan.

Johne's responsibilities

Mr Dawson is now focussed on phase two of the industry-led Action Group's plan. "This takes Johne's control a step further for GB producers. Pivotal to this phase is building a stronger relationship between producers and their vets. It will require the vet to verify, each year, that the producer has implemented a control strategy appropriate to the farm."

The proposed signed declaration will be made by a vet who has undergone the BCVA Johne's control training



Risk assessment report identifies weaknesses

programme – an on-line Continuing Professional Development (CPD) course. Introduced earlier this year, more than 200 vets have already completed this training.

"Phase two builds on the industry's investment so far," says Mr Dawson. "It's important that we do this and that we are seen to be taking a responsible approach to protect the sustainability of our dairy herds," he explains, adding that the forward momentum of phase one will be maintained by producers and vets working together and with the support of processors who specify that producers meet their commitments in this area.

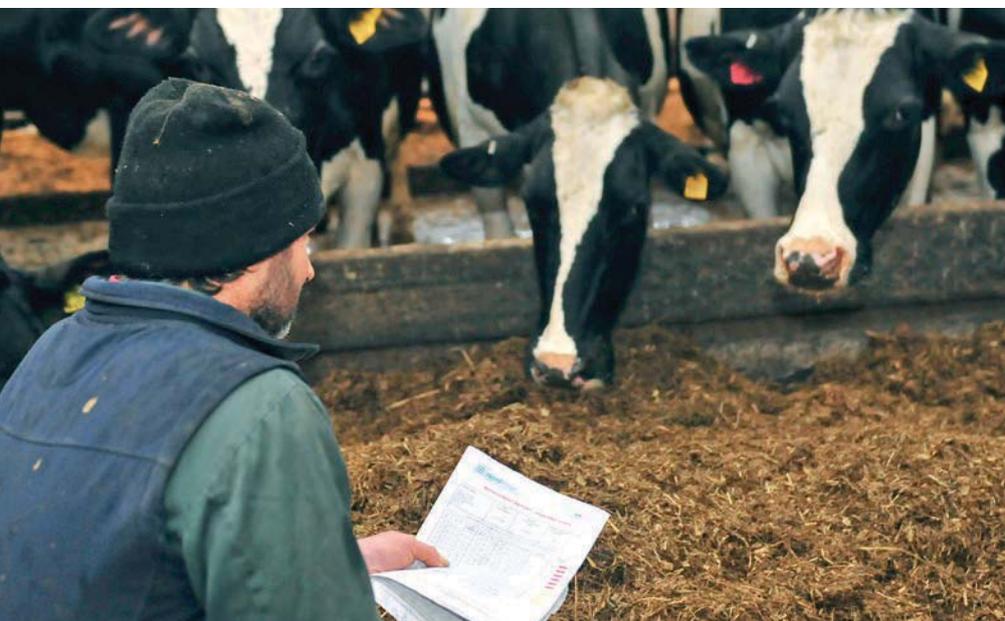
"It's important that we take this pragmatic approach to controlling Johne's. The UK has to put itself in the position of having a robust control plan for Johne's with commitment throughout the supply chain."

Minimise risks

As a producer, chairman of the Action Group for Johne's and vice chairman of OMSCo, Gwent-based Lyndon Edwards says that doing nothing is not an option when it comes to Johne's control. "You can't cure Johne's affected animals, but you can reduce or eliminate the risk of further spread."

He adds that all 250 OMSCo suppliers are

Increasing number of producers have a Johne's plan in place





Vet and producer link is pivotal to phase two

already signed up to one of the six Johne's control strategies. They will now be completing the NML Risk Assessment this autumn. This is a service developed through MyHealthyHerd that generates a report based on comprehensive questionnaire data. This report will show any 'risk' areas for Johne's entry and/or spread in the herd.

"It's a belt-and-braces approach and it will standardise the results within the group, as well as identify any further weaknesses that have been over-looked and track improvements."

Apart from maintaining a healthier herd, Mr Edwards believes that active control of Johne's in our herds is an expectation of the industry. "The UK has a good reputation for supplying top quality dairy products and we should have everything in place to make sure that we maintain this reputation from farm level to the end product."

Quality endorsement

Agreeing with this is Anthony Barber, from Barber's Farmhouse Cheese. "We sell premium cheddar cheese and whey products all around the world and we want a quality endorsement right through the supply chain," he says.

"This includes the milk production process and ensuring that disease control measures are in place is important. Johne's control is key as it has a massive economic impact at farm level. With a pool of 120 producers, we are in a position to help them to be as viable as possible."

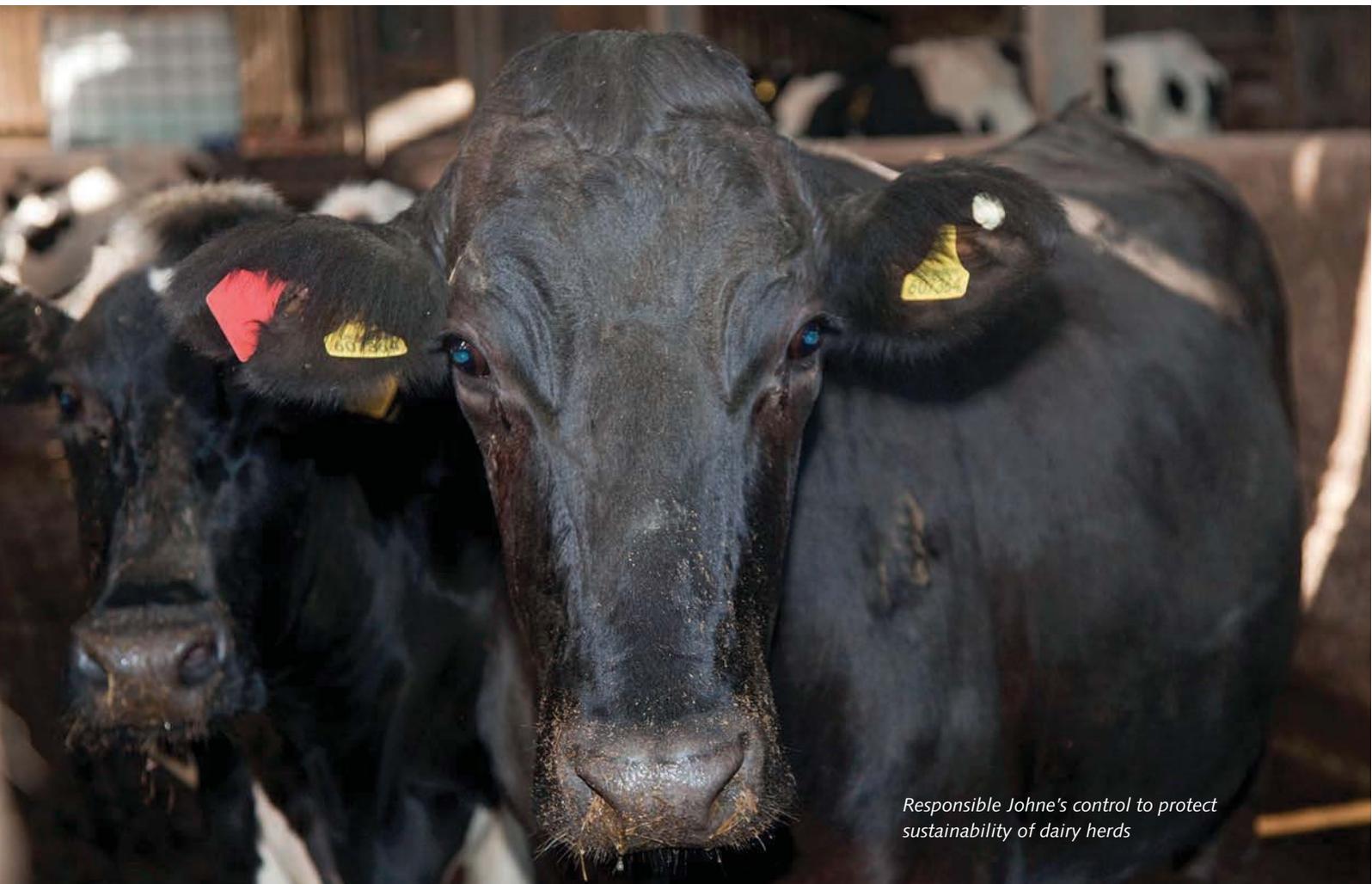
Mr Barber admits to having tried various initiatives to encourage Johne's control on farms to varying degrees of success. He hopes this latest initiative, set to run in the autumn, will gather more traction and forge strong vet and producer links

based on Johne's risk assessment data. "We are hosting meetings run by NML and MyHealthyHerd for all the vets involved with our producer pool. We're particularly looking at the risk assessment service and supporting milk surveillance testing, encouraging vets to endorse these within their control plans on farm," he says.

"We're following these with supplier meetings and encouraging closer links between the producer and the vet. We'd like to see all our suppliers carrying out a Johne's risk assessment and identifying any weaknesses in their control plans in the next few months."

NML is working with a number of other dairy processors and veterinary practices to encourage the use of risk assessments.

"We've also offered assessments to our HerdWise customers, who are already screening their cows quarterly for Johne's infection," says NMR vet and chair of the Action Johne's technical group Karen Bond. "By establishing the risk of entry and potential spread of Johne's at farm level, producers and their vets will be able to identify areas where control plans need to be tightened. This will help to reduce the prevalence of Johne's as quickly as possible".



Responsible Johne's control to protect sustainability of dairy herds