

Producer funds available for participation in the Georgia Voluntary Bovine Johne's disease Control Program

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Johne's disease

Johne's disease usually infects a calf shortly after birth. The pathogen (bug) can be shed in the feces, colostrum, or the milk. In heavily infected herds, the disease also may infect older cattle. It takes several years (2 – 10) before an infected animal shows signs of the disease. What you might see is a two year old or older cow that is eating normally but has a chronic (long-standing) diarrhea. These cattle can easily be confused with wormy cattle but they do not respond to worm medications. The cow gets progressively thinner and stop eating over a period of several weeks. There is no treatment for Johne's and eventually they will die from the disease. **Most Georgia beef herds do not currently have a Johne's disease problem and should concentrate their efforts on keeping Johne's disease out of the herd.** Like most cattle diseases, it is usually brought onto a farm when new cattle are purchased (i. e., **you may pay good money to purchase Johne's infected cattle**). *When you buy cows or your next bull make sure you get a health paper and request that the veterinarian include a statement on the health paper, that the herd of origin has not had a diagnosis or clinical signs of Johne's disease in the last five years.* If you have cows that have a chronic diarrhea, start out eating but over a period of weeks get thinner and stop eating, then you and your veterinarian should determine the cause of the problem.

There are several levels of concern for beef producers regarding Johne's disease. The first level is production cost. Economic costs to the beef cattle industry include loss of genetics, decreased production due to lowered milk production, decreased breeding cattle cull weight, increased culling rates, decreased fertility, and costs of diagnostic testing. We did a study to determine the prevalence of Johne's in Georgia beef and dairy cattle and the cost to Georgia producers of having the disease. We found that the **level of disease in Georgia beef cattle appears to be about 4%**. Even at this low level, cost analysis determined that **Johne's disease is currently costing the beef industry in Georgia between \$1,836,750.00 and \$4,898,000.00**. Johne's is an expensive disease for our cattle industry to live with. In addition the longer the problem is ignored, the more herds that will be affected with Johne's disease.

The Georgia Johne's Program

The Georgia Voluntary Johne's disease Control Program has been established to help beef and dairy producers address the problem of Johne's disease in Georgia. The program originated in the Georgia Dept of Ag and is financed by USDA. The administration of the program is through the Georgia Designated Johne's Coordinator. Producers can voluntarily participate in the program at three levels. Education is the first level, disease management is the second level and herd testing, and classification is the third level. The program is completing the initial stages of the educational phase. This is the most important phase of the program as it informs producers of the disease and empowers producers with the knowledge to either avoid the disease or reduce the economic impact of Johne's disease on their farm. We have presented ten producer seminars on Johne's disease with a total of 246 cattle producers attending these two-hour

seminars. If you have not had the opportunity to attend one of these meetings and would like a seminar in your area, please contact me and I'll try to make the arrangements. These meetings are designed to inform cattle producers about the Georgia voluntary Johne's disease control program and to improve the profitability of Georgia beef producers through voluntary participation in the Georgia Johne's program. The meetings are free to cattle producers and supported through the cooperative efforts of Georgia Johne's Working Group, Georgia Cattlemen's Association, Georgia Farm Bureau, Georgia Milk Producers, UGA Animal Science Extension, UGA College of Veterinary Medicine, Georgia Department of Agriculture, and the USDA.

After the educational phase is completed you may choose to participate in the management phase of the program. This phase consists of an evaluation of your herd biosecurity and management related to controlling diseases, specifically Johne's disease. The management phase requires you to contact a specifically trained Georgia Johne's Certified Veterinarian and together you would evaluate the herd through a risk assessment and develop a farm management plan. A list of these Johne's Certified Veterinarians is available at the Georgia Department of Agriculture. Funding for the management phase of the program has been appropriated by the USDA and is being administered by the Georgia Department of Agriculture. This consists of funds to reimburse a Johne's Certified Veterinarian and to reimburse the producer for the direct costs of implementing the farm management plan. Funding is available to reimburse the cost of the risk assessment and farm management plan at \$200.00 for herds 50 or less, \$300.00 for herds 51-200, and \$400.00 for herds 201+. In addition to these funds, producers will be reimbursed \$200.00 to \$400.00 for their direct costs associated with implementing the farm management plans.

If a producer chooses to enlist their herd further in the program after the management phase, they enter the third phase which includes testing and classification of the herd. **An initial test of thirty randomly selected mature cattle would enable a herd to be classified in the Georgia Voluntary Johne's disease Control Program.** The cost of this initial testing is paid by USDA funds administered by GDA, so there is direct no cost to the producer for this initial testing.

Because of the emphasis the USDA and the GDA has placed on Johne's disease producers will be able to participate in all three phases of the Georgia Voluntary Johne's disease Control Program at little or no costs. Phase one is education and there is no charge for the seminars. Phase two is management and producers can be reimbursed \$400 to \$800 for the cost of the risk assessment, a farm management plan and the direct costs of implementing the farm management plan. Phase three is herd classification and testing and there is no cost for the initial testing of 30 head to classify a herd.

If you would like further information on the Georgia Voluntary Johne's disease Control Program or to arrange for a Johne's producer seminar in your area please contact Dr. Mel Pence, Georgia Designated Johne's Coordinator at 229 386 3340 or mepence@uga.edu.