

# **National Standards for Proposed Voluntary Johne's Disease Program for Cattle**

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## **What is Johne's disease?**

The bacterium that causes Johne's disease is related to the bacteria that cause TB. They are both infections that generally take a long time to develop and are difficult to treat. Johne's infects the fetus in the uterus or a calf shortly after birth. The bacteria can be shed in the feces 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 are easily confused with wormy cattle but they do not respond to worm medications. They get 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.

There are several levels of concern about 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 showed that **Johne's disease is currently costing the beef industry in Georgia between \$1,836,750.00 and \$4,898,000.00.** Johne's Disease is an expensive disease for our cattle industry to live with. The longer the problem is ignored, the more herds will be affected with Johne's disease. Producers need a source of seedstock that has a validated Johne's disease status if they are to remain free of Johne's.

**Most Georgia beef herds do not currently have a Johne's disease problem and producers should concentrate their efforts on keeping Johne's disease out of the herd.** As with most cattle diseases, the infection is usually brought onto a farm when new cattle are purchased (i.e., you may pay good money to get Johne's). When you buy cows or your next bull make sure you receive health papers 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 well but, over a period of weeks, get thinner and stop eating, you and your veterinarian should determine the cause of the problem.

That is where a voluntary Johne's program will help you keep Johne's disease off your farm. It will allow you to have information about the disease status of the herd you purchase cattle.

## **U. S. Voluntary Johne's Disease Program for Cattle**

**A key point in this program is that with current testing we can do a good job of detecting which herds are infected with Johne's disease.** The program is voluntary and is administered by a state Johne's disease group through the designated Johne's coordinator. The Johne's state coordinator is assisted by trained Johne's certified

veterinarians. The program has three phases to it: 1) producer education about Johne's prevention 2) on-farm risk assessments and management plans and 3) testing and classification. Producers may elect to participate in the educational only or they may participate in the educational and management parts of the program. This would include a herd risk assessment and herd management plan. If producers wish to participate in the herd testing and classification, they must first complete the educational and management parts of the program. Herd testing and classification begins with a screen test to determine if a herd has Johne's disease. This is a random test of 30 cattle that are over 3 years. If the herd tests positive, they are classified from A-D depending on the number of positive cattle in a whole herd test (A minimal, B <5%, C 5-15%, D > 15%). All herds with 1 or more positive cattle on initial testing start with a classification of D unless a whole herd test was done. Those herds that test negative will be classified 1-4 depending on the number of years their herd tests negative; 1, negative on initial testing, 2, 2-years of testing negative, 3, 3-years of negative testing, and 4, 4-years of negative testing. Yearly testing is required to stay in program.

We would anticipate that most purebred producers would be involved in this program. Once purebred producers validate that cattle producers are not likely to get Johne's by purchasing from them, they should be able to add value their cattle.

**Commercial cattle producers can use this information to help them decide where to purchase cattle that will cause them the least disease problems.**

In the future commercial beef producers will have a lot more information about disease problems in the purebred cattle herds they purchase bulls. This information should help reduce the spread of disease and increase profit in the Georgia beef cattle industry.