During the MSUE winter dairy program “Animal Health: Managing Diseases on your Dairy Farm” nine proactive dairy producers shared their experiences with Johne’s disease. Having diagnosed Johne’s disease in their farms, these producers chose to grab the bull by the horns. They recognized that Johne’s disease is a serious problem and put in place practices aimed at reducing the prevalence of the disease in their herds.

These producers came from different farm sizes and areas of Michigan. Yet all agreed that managing Johne’s disease in their herds was important and worth the time and effort. Some were managing the disease before it gained a major toehold in the herd while others were dealing with cows that showed clinical signs and higher cull rates and deaths. They realized the impact that Johne’s disease can have on herd profitability, overall health, and consumer confidence in their products. While each of these producers had implemented practices that matched their risks, goals, and abilities, some measures to control the disease were employed by almost all.

1. Providing individual calving pens.
2. Removing the calf from the dam within 1 hour of birth.
3. Not using colostrum from Johne’s infected or suspect dams for heifer calves.
4. Not feeding unpasteurized waste milk to calves.
5. Not using the same skid steer or tractor bucket to feed cattle and remove manure.
6. Separating young stock housing from adult cow housing.

In addition to controlling the disease itself, many producers are working to reduce the risk of Johne’s disease transmission.

7. Ending use of a cattle trailer to move calves on and
between farms.
8. Ear notching calves born of positive dams to easily identify them as higher risk animals.
9. Halting spread of manure on alfalfa fields.
10. Separating bull calves from heifer calves if bull calves get colostrum or milk from Johne’s disease-positive cows.
11. Cleaning Johne’s disease-negative calving pens as often as possible.
12. Holding an annual meeting on Johne’s disease control for everyone who works with the farm livestock.
13. Using milk Enzyme-Linked Immunosorbent Assay (ELISA) on the last DHI test before dry off to help make more informed management decisions at calving.
14. Examining inseminated cows by ultrasound and culling Johne’s disease-positive cows if not pregnant or if carrying a bull calf.
15. No longer feeding waste feed from cow barn to heifers.

Johne’s disease is a serious herd health problem and potentially a public health concern. Dairy producers are encouraged to implement a Johne’s disease control and prevention program. The best way to do this is to work with your veterinarian by conducting a Johne’s risk assessment and then developing a farm plan based on the identified risks. For more information on Johne’s disease, visit <http://cvm.msu.edu/extension/johnes>.