

# **Beliefs, benefits, and beyond: Influences on dairy farmers' management decisions**

Caroline Ritter, Jolanda Jansen, Steven Roche, David F. Kelton, Cindy L. Adams, Karin Orsel, Ron J. Erskine, Geart Benedictus, Theo J.G.M. Lam, and Herman W. Barkema

Department of Production Animal Health, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, University of Calgary. 3330 Hospital Dr NW Calgary AB T2N 4N1. E-mail: cmnritte@ucalgary.ca

**Introduction:** Disease prevention and control programs worldwide often face the challenge of low farmer participation rates. To improve participation by taking farmers' beliefs, needs and expectations into account, a better understanding of influences on farmers' management decisions is necessary. Therefore, the aim of this study was to review relevant literature about influences affecting farmers' management decisions, and to provide recommendations on how to account for these factors when designing disease control programs.

**Results:** Every farmer is different, as are every farmers' circumstances. Individual demographics (e.g. age, culture), and agricultural contexts (e.g. milk prices, consumer demand) can influence on-farm decision making. However, if farmers do not regard a specific issue as a (present and/or future) problem it is unlikely that they will take action to overcome it. Furthermore, confidence in their ability to implement the recommended management practice, belief in the strategy's efficacy and feasibility/practicality are factors that can influence whether a management practice will be adopted. Financial considerations are often an important factor when farmers weigh advantages of potential on-farm changes against expected disadvantages. However, non-economic influences (e.g., social norms or pride in good animal husbandry) can also play an essential role.

**Implications:** When designing disease prevention and control programs, socio-psychological influences should also be addressed. An interdisciplinary approach that includes stakeholders, social scientists, and communication specialists is recommended to design programs that account for the wide spectrum of farmers' motivators and barriers and move beyond economic argumentation.