

Communication Extension to Alberta Dairy Farmers

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Introduction: Despite ongoing efforts to enhance farmers' participation in the Alberta Johne's Disease Initiative (AJDI), approximately 40% of all Alberta dairy farmers were not involved in the AJDI at time of study initiation. The aim of the study was to investigate extension communication preferences of these "hard to reach" producers.

Methods: Surveys including questions about communication preferences were conducted with Alberta dairy producers that did not participate in the AJDI. All 250 non-participating farmers were contacted and 164 producers agreed to be interviewed in person. The interview was conducted using a standardized questionnaire with 38 questions that was first evaluated on 10 dairy farms.

Results: On a scale from 1 to 5, dairy farmers regarded the veterinarian as most important source for information with a preference score of 3.6. The Western Canadian Dairy Seminar (WCDS) and information via email were rated as least important with a score of 2.3. Different communication strategies were preferred by different groups of producers: With increasing age, years as producer, education and decreasing years until retirement, especially seminars were seen as less attractive. However, travel distance or time was not associated with producers' willingness to attend seminars.

Implications: Veterinarians play an important role as trusted advisors and are potent mediators between research and producers. Additionally, different communication strategies should be applied to target specific producer groups based on their preferences. Media, such as newsletters or radio, has great potential to reach a wide spectrum of producers. Seminars need to be attractive, particularly to older and more experienced producers, in order to reach them effectively.