

Factors Influencing Participation of Dairy Farmers in the Alberta Johne's Disease Initiative

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Introduction: Despite extensive communication strategies and low cost to the producer, approximately 35% of Alberta dairy farms never enrolled in the Alberta Johne's Disease Initiative (AJDI). The purpose of the study was to identify reasons of non-participation to make knowledge transfer and communication to dairy producers more efficient.

Methods: 61 AJDI participants and 163 AJDI non-participants were interviewed in person using standardized questionnaires. The groups were compared in regards to their 1) general farm characteristics, 2) attitudes, norms and beliefs towards Johne's disease (JD) and the AJDI, 3) main farm goals and constraints, 4) self-assessed knowledge of JD, and 5) use and influence of information sources.

Results: The most distinct differences between the groups were that farms participating in the AJDI had a larger herd size, had a higher self-assessed knowledge of JD, had a better understanding of AJDI details prior to participation and used the veterinarian more often compared to non-participants. In contrast, non-participants perceived time as greater constraint on their farms and it was more important to them that the program has worked on other farms before they considered to participate.

Implications: Communication to non-participants should take the individual situation of each producer into account. Educating non-participants about the details of the AJDI and emphasizing that many management changes do not necessarily take more time will help to increase their motivation to enroll. The herd veterinarian or other producers that report from positive AJDI experiences are ideal mediators to induce participation.