



The Victorian EBL Eradication Program

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Enzootic Bovine Leucosis (EBL) is a viral disease of cattle. The disease causes economic loss through decreased production and increased mortality of cattle with tumors and restricted trade of cattle, semen, ova, and milk products from affected herds and regions. An EBL eradication program commenced in Victoria in 1994 and has resulted in more than 99% of Victorian dairy herds being declared free of EBL.

Background

In order to protect Australia's international export trade in cattle, milk and dairy products, governments and the dairy industry across Australia are co-operating to eradicate EBL from the national dairy herd.

Within Victoria, all sectors of the dairy industry (farmers, processors, vets, the herd recording industry and government) came together in 1994 to develop and manage an eradication program to remove EBL from the Victorian dairy herd.

The program involves regular testing of the vat milk from every dairy farm in Victoria, testing milk collected in herd recording centres and testing of individual animals on farms found to have EBL. The program is delivered by accredited private veterinary practitioners and administered by the Department of Primary Industries (DPI).

Testing vat milk

The tests for EBL are very accurate and are able to detect very small amounts of antibody in milk. It has been shown that the EBL test can detect antibody from one EBL infected cow even when her milk is mixed with the milk from 199 other, non-infected cows in the herd. This means that testing milk from the vat is a good way of finding most EBL infected herds. The Victorian EBL eradication program uses this "bulk milk" testing (BMT) technology as a way of screening all the herds in the State. The aim is to test the milk in every vat, on every farm, three times a year.

Other testing

Unfortunately, the BMT screening tests can be negative if the herd is large and/or there are very small numbers of infected animals in the herd. Consequently, another

method of herd screening was devised using the milk samples from herds undergoing herd production recording. After the milks have been tested for butterfat, protein and cell count, the milks from between 30 and 45 cows are mixed together to form a pooled sample. The pooled sample is then tested for EBL. In this way even very large herds can be accurately tested for EBL.



Individual animal testing

If a herd is found to contain EBL infected cattle either through bulk milk testing, pooled milk testing or testing for some other reason, the herd owners are offered entry into a testing program that involves repeated blood testing of all cattle over the age of six months and the implementation of management strategies to limit the spread of the EBL virus. The testing program is conducted on the farm at no cost to the producer.

For more information contact your local DPI Animal Health staff or your veterinarian.

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