



Avoiding Bovine Johne's Disease when Agisting Cattle

Updated: May 2007

AG0930

ISSN 1329-8062

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Agistment is a valuable tool for improving farm productivity, but requires careful planning to avoid infecting cattle with bovine Johne's disease (BJD).

What are the Risks?

Agistment can occur with minimal risk of spreading BJD, providing land owners and agistors understand that calves less than 12 months of age are most susceptible to becoming infected (infection of adult cattle is a rare event) and plan the agistment accordingly.

Simple precautions include:

- Separation of calves from adult cattle, and
- Land owners not running their own young cattle on land grazed by adult cattle within the previous 12 months.

Plan your agistment program in advance to minimise the risks.



Figure 1. Avoid introducing BJD through agistment.

Seeking Land for Agistment

When seeking agistment, it is wise to determine the BJD status of the agistment property using the Dairy BJD Assurance Score (refer Information Note AG1187 – The Dairy BJD Assurance Score – the higher the score the higher the assurance). With this knowledge, agistment can be planned to reduce the spread of BJD.

- Calves in the Johne's Disease Calf Accreditation Program (JDCAP) should only be agisted with calves from herds in the JDCAP.
- **Owners of CattleMAP herds should check with their MAP veterinarian prior to agisting any cattle.**
- Deer, goats, and camelids (alpacas and llamas) can be infected with BJD, so it is important that calves do not have access to pastures grazed by these species.
- Cows that calve down on the agistment property should do so in an area free of dairy effluent or heavy manure contamination.
- Feed, drinking water and irrigation water should be free from contamination with manure or effluent which may contain BJD bacteria.
- The grazing area should be securely fenced to exclude stray cattle.

Infected Herds

Owners of BJD 'Infected' or 'Suspect' herds can reduce exposure of young cattle to the disease by agisting them off the property. When agisting, land owners should be advised of the BJD status of the herd so that suitable precautions can be taken.

Providing Land for Agistment

When agisting cattle, there is a risk of introducing BJD onto the property. The land holder should request details of the herd's BJD status from the owner. (Refer Dairy BJD Assurance Score).

Most herds in Victoria have a 'Non-Assessed' status for BJD. This means that there is no known recent history of BJD in the herd (refer to Information Note: *Understanding bovine Johne's disease statuses*).

A 'Non-Assessed' status does not guarantee BJD freedom. Cattle from an 'Infected' herd could affect the agistment property's status and market access for other enterprises on the property, but this can usually be avoided with proper planning.

Prior to agisting stock, landholders should consider:

- The risk of introducing BJD into their own herd
- The risk of spreading BJD to other agisted cattle

Whilst young cattle are most susceptible to infection, they are less likely to shed BJD bacteria onto the pasture than adult cattle. BJD bacteria can survive in the environment for up to 12 months. Young cattle should not graze land that adult cattle have grazed during the previous 12 months.

Further Information

Further information about BJD and agisting cattle can be obtained from Animal Health staff at your nearest DPI office, your veterinary practitioner or on the DPI external web site: <http://www.dpi.vic.gov.au/farming/bjd>.

The previous version of this Information Note was published in December 2005.

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