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Animal Agriculture Producers to Benefit from New National Johne's Disease Control Program Strategic Plan

BOWLING GREEN, KY—Animal agriculture has several partners fighting in their corner when it comes to reducing the incidence of Johne's disease in individual herds and reducing the risk of introducing Johne's disease to uninfected herds. These partners—including the National Johne's Working Group, the U.S. Animal Health Association Committee on Johne's Disease, Johne's Integrated Disease Program and USDA/Animal Plant and Health Inspection Services/Veterinary Services—recently provided input that resulted in the new National Johne's Disease Control Program Strategic Plan.

"The new National Johne's Disease Control Program Strategic Plan is designed with producer's front and center," states Dr. Andy Schwartz, Texas Animal Health Commission and chair of the Committee on Johne's Disease, U.S. Animal Health Association. "Through a public/private partnership, items within the Strategic Plan will result in producers, veterinarians and consultants having more tools, and having these new tools as well as the current tools readily available, so Johne's disease can be effectively addressed."

Dr. Schwartz stresses that Johne's disease is known to negatively impact the bottom line of producers in both the dairy and beef industries as well as many of those within the sheep, goat, bison and other small ruminant industries. He adds that producers need proactive measures so they do not have to be reactive to Johne's disease and its resulting premature culling.

"When you consider the findings of the National Animal Health Monitoring Systems (NAHMS) Dairy 2007 study and studies within other industries, it is clear that producers need more tools," Dr. Schwartz states.

"The National Johne's Disease Control Program Strategic Plan underscores the need for practical, effective tools that the everyday producer knows about and that are readily available to veterinarians, consultants and producers. Developing these tools requires significant research, and this research is a high priority of the new Strategic Plan."

Among the research areas needing attention, according to the new National Johne's Disease Control Program Strategic Plan, are diagnostics, vaccines, economic impact and management practices.

Dr. Schwartz explains that today's diagnostic tests and procedures work best in older animals but are less accurate for younger animals. He says that detecting the causal agent in younger cattle is "extremely important," adding that animals tend to become infected as young calves but do not exhibit clinical disease signs until they are three years of age. In the meantime, infected animals can be shedding organisms that help spread the disease within a herd or, if sold, can spread Johne's disease to a new uninfected herd.

"Diagnostic tests and procedures targeting young animals are needed," Dr. Schwartz elaborates. "In addition the industry needs to develop rapid, more accurate tests that focus on better cell-mediated immunity (CMI) tests and improved antigens, bulk tank testing—quantitative ELISA milk test and

environmental sampling protocols for dairy and beef. Plus we need to develop tuberculosis diagnostic or testing procedures that focus on fewer *M. bovis* cross reactions and that do not cross-react with a Johne's vaccine."

Dr. Elisabeth Patton, Designated Johne's Coordinator for Wisconsin and vice chair of the Committee on Johne's Disease, U.S. Animal Health Association, points out that the new Johne's Disease Control Program Strategic Plan takes a hard look at other areas of needed research, including the need for the development and validation of improved vaccines to help prevent Johne's disease. Dr. Patton explains that although a killed vaccine is available for use today, it is only available for use in some states. In states that allow use of the killed vaccine, the vaccine can only be administered with the state veterinarian's approval and then to calves no older than 35 days.

"The industry needs Johne's disease vaccines that are approved for use in all states," Dr. Patton states. "We need one or more Johne's disease vaccines that have fewer side effects including reduced cross-reactivity with the TB testing."

Two other research interest areas within the Strategic Plan are the economic impact of Johne's disease and the identification of management practices that help control the disease while providing economic benefit for the livestock owner. Yes, if the Strategic Plan is followed, research will be undertaken to quantify the cost/benefits of recommended management practices, so producers know that it pays to implement various management practices.

"The new Strategic Plan replaces the previous strategic plan dated July 2004," Dr. Schwartz states. "In writing the plan, those involved considered how the program is doing and what should change over the next five years to most effectively address Johne's disease. The resulting Strategic Plan reflects input from industry, academia and government.

"I must stress that the new Strategic Plan covers more than research, however. In addition to the research component, the Plan also lists strategies focusing on educational efforts, making herd assessment and management tools readily available and updating the current classification system.

"We want to simplify today's classification system, address differences in herd sizes and recognize lowest risk/lowest prevalence herds. While updating the current classification system will be a major undertaking, we can see the benefit from updating it."

To learn more Johne's disease or to read the National Johne's Disease Control Program Strategic Plan in full, visit www.johnesdisease.org, the official web site of the National Johne's Education Initiative.

The National Institute for Animal Agriculture (NIAA) is dedicated to programs that work towards the eradication of diseases that pose risk to the health of animals, wildlife and humans; promote a safe and wholesome food supply for our nation and abroad; and promote best practices in environmental stewardship, animal health and well-being. NIAA members include producers, veterinarians, animal scientists, researchers, state and federal officials, and agribusiness executives. More information is available at www.animalagriculture.org.

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