

Protect your farm from *Mycoplasma bovis* – managing service bulls

Mycoplasma bovis is still a concern for the dairy and beef industries in New Zealand. Infection has been identified in herds in Canterbury, Southland and Hawkes Bay. All known infected herds are under MPI surveillance, including movement controls. Further testing of all dairy herds in New Zealand is underway via bulk milk and discard milk testing. This national surveillance should be completed by late March/early April 2018. The aim of this testing is to see if there are any other clusters of infected herds present that have not been discovered through the extensive surveillance already conducted.

The highest risk for the spread of infection is the movement of infected animals from one herd to another. Bulls who have been in contact with infected cows, and then moved to another herd are a risk for the spread of infection.

TESTING FOR *MYCOPLASMA BOVIS*

Mycoplasma bovis is not an easy disease to test for on an individual animal basis, especially in animals not showing clinical signs. The tests available are designed to either work at a herd level, to show animals are having immune responses to circulating infection in the herd, or on animals actively shedding the bacteria. Animals only shed *Mycoplasma bovis* intermittently, and immune responses to infection vary. Therefore, negative results on a single bull can't be interpreted to mean that that animal is not infected, and a positive result on the herd test does not mean that the bull has *Mycoplasma bovis* either. The best indicator of whether an animal may be infected is the health status of the herd the animal comes from.

INTERPRETING THE TEST RESULTS

As noted above, we expect all dairy herds in New Zealand will have been tested for *Mycoplasma bovis* and the results known by late March/early April 2018. Animals from dairy herds that have been tested and where infection is not detected can be considered low risk for spread of infection. Animals from herds that don't yet have test results should be held on farm until test results are available, or sent directly to slaughter if it is not practical to hold them. Herds with test results that indicate evidence of *Mycoplasma bovis* infection will receive directions from MPI on the management and movement of animals, and owners of bulls that have been there will be contacted. Ensuring your animals' NAIT movements are recorded will assist in this situation.

BULLS

The following recommendations are provided for the management of disease risks associated with service bulls. It is acknowledged that many bulls will have already completed mating for 2017/18 and have been moved, however, there will still be aspects of the recommendations below that can be implemented, and the recommendations can be used in preparing for mating in autumn 2018, and spring/summer 2018/19.

In all cases it is essential that the bulls are properly identified and NAIT records are completed promptly for all movements.



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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT OF BULLS:

1. Bulls arriving on farm – all ages

Bulls should arrive properly identified and accompanied by details of their movement history. Make sure you let the vendor or agent know that you will be expecting to be provided with these details.

On arrival the bulls should be held separately from the main herd for at least 7 days to enable an assessment to be made of their health status, and for any procedures such as drenching to be completed. If you have any concerns about the health of the bulls, contact your veterinarian before you mix the bulls with the herd.

2. Bulls leaving the farm

If the bulls are leased, then talk over the options with the owner.

R2 bulls – once mating is finished these bulls should be sent directly to slaughter. It is important that they go from the farm to the slaughter premises directly and not via saleyards or some other intermediate stopping point. If they are being held for further use (mating in autumn 2018, or spring/summer 2018/19) then the recommendations for R1 bulls should be followed.

R1 bulls – these bulls may be a risk for the spread of infection. The best indicator of the level of risk from these bulls is the health status of the herd the bulls have been running with. If the herd has been screened via bulk milk and discard milk tests, and the results show *Mycoplasma bovis* infection is not detected, then the risk of these bulls spreading infection is greatly reduced. If the herd does not have any test results then these bulls should be held on farm until the results are available, or sent directly to slaughter. If it is necessary to move these bulls to another farm, then they should be held separately to resident stock until the dairy herd test results are available. If the test results show evidence of *Mycoplasma bovis* infection MPI will provide direction for the ongoing management or slaughter of any animals leaving the farm, including bulls.

All dairy and beef farmers must ensure their NAIT records are correct and up to date.



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