

FARMING

Mycoplasma tests uncover low numbers

GERARD HUTCHING

Mass testing of milk from all dairy farms this spring has so far turned up only three properties with the cattle disease Mycoplasma bovis.

The testing has been carried out over the last 12 weeks, starting at the top of the North Island, and is nearly finished in the South Island.

Ministry for Primary Industries principal scientist Dr John Roche conceded that several months ago there were some doubters within MPI and elsewhere over the possibility of eradication.

“If you went back a couple of months before we started the spring milk testing, there were a number of people who were concerned we would learn stuff this spring that would make us change our minds.

“Even those of us confident we could eradicate it expected to see a greater outbreak. But now you won’t find too many dissenting views,” Roche said.

Part of the reason why so few cases were being detected was the time between infection and identification had become so short that animals were not spreading beyond infected farms.

Roche said he was personally committed to eradication after his experience in the United States a decade ago when he was working on a dairy farm with the disease.

“I wouldn’t wish it on my worst enemy. Nationally we could manage it but on individual farms it would be an unmitigated disaster. We set up a couple of farms in the US just over a decade ago and brought different herds together as we created our own herd, but ended up in an incredibly stressful situation. Within weeks of calving we were dealing with uncontrollable mastitis and calves dying.”

Roche also wanted to address several myths surrounding the disease. These included:

* M bovis first arrived in New



MPI principal scientist Dr John Roche is more confident eradication of Mycoplasma is a possibility after milk testing.

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Zealand around 2004;

* It can thrive in soil conditions leading to re-infection after cleaning and disinfecting and the following stand-down period;

* Intensive barn farming has aided the spread of the disease.

Roche said scientists were confident M bovis was a recent arrival, despite persistent claims it has been in New Zealand for more than a decade.

Two threads of evidence support the official narrative. One is a bulk milk sampling across the country carried out in 2007 which failed to detect the disease, the other recent DNA testing of the bacteria.

In 2007 scientists and officials from the former Ministry of

Agriculture random-tested the milk of 244 herds for the presence of the disease, but detected nothing.

Roche said the other evidence related to the DNA testing of the bacteria.

“We’re using a molecular clock, the bacteria mutates every so often so by culturing the bacteria and sequencing the genome we can see the changes in the DNA of the bacteria through time and that gives us great confidence.

“Massey’s epidemiology team are confident on the basis of all the samples they have, that it started here between December 2015 and January 2016, and the more samples we analyse the narrower the window,” Roche

said.

The evidence to the contrary was hearsay, usually from a farmer who had “really uncontrollable mastitis” more than a decade ago.

However commentator Keith Woodford has raised the possibility of other cases “where the logical infection path only makes sense if the disease were here by 2014 or earlier”.

An MPI spokeswoman said MPI had invited Woodford on several occasions to provide evidence to back up his claims but he declined to do so. He also did not have the same detail of information that MPI had.

Roche said there was no international scientific evidence that M bovis survived in soil. The primary risk pathways were cattle-to-cattle contact or contaminated milk.

He refuted claims intensive barn farming aided the spread of the disease.

Most of the cattle detected in New Zealand had been grazing outdoors for most of their life. The disease might spread through a farm “a bit quicker” if cattle were in intensive systems.

The latest figures show there are 33 infected properties, restricted properties stand at 53, and those under notices of direction are 248.

There are 277 under active surveillance, referring to properties which MPI have identified are at risk and testing has begun to confirm whether the disease is present or not.

ATTENTION FARMERS



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GO WAIHI COLUMN

Friday November 16 2018

And there goes the first half of another month. I hope the Scholarship and NCEA exams are going well. The weather’s been a mixed bag, as you’d expect for spring, with warmer and sometimes wet conditions. Unofficially summer’s just a couple of weeks away if you go by the months. It was great to hear a lot of cacophony with Armistice Day last Sunday just after 11 am, with church bells tolling for the end of WWI on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month a hundred years ago, and then sirens, car horns and the like sounding off to mark a special commemoration, our thoughts to all those who gave their lives so we could have the life we enjoy today.

GO WAIHI’S \$1000 POT OF GOLD WON

We had a huge response to our GO Waihi Stop, Shop and Win Pot of Gold Competition across Goldfest with OceanaGold and Alton Drilling Ltd. The large box was full to the brim with entries from folk who shopped locally in participating Waihi stores. The winner of the 1000 \$1 coins was Wai Wetere from Waihi. Congrats from the GO Waihi team and thanks to everyone who took part, it’s great to see you supporting our local businesses.

CHRISTMAS MARKET – MARK IT IN YOUR DIARY - SATURDAY 8 DECEMBER

Application forms are out for the GO Waihi Christmas Market the morning of the Christmas Parade, Saturday 8 December. Variety to what the shops have is what we’re after, something a little different. Get an application form from the HDC Waihi office in Rosemont Rd, Gold FM upstairs at 17 Haszard St or download one at www.waihi.org.nz. It’s a fun morning with entertainment and lots of folk Christmas shopping and we’d love you to be a part of it.

HO HO HO AWAY WE GO

GO Waihi’s Christmas Parade with Harcourts Good Star Real Estate is coming up on Saturday 8 December with the lone piper signaling the start at 1 pm. We have lots of the local schools and pre-schools already registered and always welcome all sorts of floats, including ‘walking floats’. Whether you are a church, a school or preschool, maybe a club, a group or organisation or even a business that wants to add some tinsel and Christmas spirit to the parade ... hey, the more the merrier. Entry forms are at HDC’s Waihi office in Rosemont Rd, Gold FM upstairs on the corner of Seddon and Haszard Streets and at www.waihi.org.nz. Entry’s free so it’s just a case of getting some friends to help build the float and you’re away. Contact Carters Contractors early if you are after a truck for your float.

FLOWERS, NATIVES, VEGETABLES, FERNS, ESTABLISHED, NEW, SMALL TO LARGE

I bet I’ve missed some out, but that’s a good start to the 14 gardens on display with Lions Club of Waihi’s Garden Ramble on Saturday and Sunday 24 and 25 November. \$20 tickets are available at Waihi Beach Hardware, Waihi Mitre 10 and Country Dog Garden Centre Paeroa. Get some friends together and get some ideas for your place. There’ll be food and refreshments with the Martha Ladies, arts and crafts for sale and gardening tools and books too.

GOT SOMETHING COMING UP, LET US KNOW

We regularly get people looking at our web and asking what’s on and coming up. Send your event details to us; it’s always good to know what’s on and what’s coming up so if anyone asks, and they do, we have the info handy.

HERE’S A THOUGHT: Improve your memory by doing unforgettable things.

www.waihi.org.nz

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