

Role of veterinary practitioners in industry-led dairy health and quality programs in Ontario

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Introduction

The Ontario dairy industry has recently embarked on a series of health and quality improvement programs for dairy producers as mandated by the national organization, Dairy Farmers of Canada. Uniquely, in Ontario 3 of these programs have been delivered via successful partnerships with private veterinary practitioners. The objective of this research was to illustrate the role private veterinarians can play in industry-led programs, and demonstrate the positive impact of such collaborations.

Materials and Methods/Results

Ontario's voluntary Johne's Management Assistance Program runs from January 2010 until October 2013. Participating herd owners are reimbursed for ELISA testing provided they complete the Johne's Risk Assessment and Management Plan (RAMP) with their herd veterinarian, and dispose of all cows that have high antibody titers (ELISA score ≥ 1.0 ; positive ELISA test score, ≥ 0.1) against *Mycobacterium avium* subsp *paratuberculosis* (MAP; the causative agent of Johne's disease) within 90 days after receiving the test results. As of March 2013, 247 private practitioners have conducted Johne's RAMPs for 2,215 producers, which accounts for 52 % of all Ontario dairy herds. Current program statistics are available at www.johnes.ca. The program is successfully delivering farm-specific recommendations to producers to prevent the spread of MAP to calves.

Canadian Quality Milk (CQM) is a national on-farm food safety program delivered by provincial milk marketing boards. In Ontario, Dairy Farmers of Ontario (DFO) partnered with the Ontario Association of Bovine Practitioners to train volunteering veterinary practitioners as program advisors. Advisors assist producers as they prepare for an on-farm audit of their protocols and standard operating procedures (SOPs) for veterinary drug use, avoidance of milk and meat residues, main-

taining and cleaning milking equipment, and other key activities. As of May 2013, 159 veterinarians have become trained CQM Advisors. Since the program was launched approximately 80% of 1,500 producers have passed their first audit completely. The remaining 20% have passed after fulfilling corrections. DFO has publicly credited a large part of the success of the program rollout and the high rate of successful producer registration to the involvement of veterinary practitioners.

On August 1, 2012, Ontario adopted 400,000 cells/mL as the regulatory limit for bulk-milk somatic cell counts (BMSCCs). In preparation for this substantial change, 58 veterinary practitioners, representing 39 practices, participated in somatic cell count workshops to learn about the use of the Mastitis RAMP. Subsequently, 23 practitioners completed a Mastitis RAMP on 70 client farms in a 2-week period as part of a pilot project. Analysis of the RAMP scores and producer quality records indicated that participating herds decreased their BMSCC and were less likely to experience an increase in BMSCC in the 3 months following the RAMP, compared with control herd for which a Mastitis RAMP was not performed.

Significance

These 3 programs are examples of veterinary practitioner and industry collaboration with positive results measured in program participation, successful program completion, and improvement in quality measures and cattle health. Veterinarians have commented that the programs strengthened their relationships with producers, improved treatment programs, increased awareness of on-farm activities, allowed formal consultation in less traditional areas such as calf health, and provided additional financial support for veterinary practices. From the industry perspective, having veterinarians deliver health programs for specific initiatives has given credibility to these programs through the addition of veterinary technical expertise and oversight.