



FARMER LED, FARMER DRIVEN

Executive Report: Decision Making — Part 1

**Deeside Monitor Farm Open Meeting
Meikle Maldron, Torphins
8th July 2026**

Johne's Disease with Tim Geraghty



Tim Geraghty discusses Johne's at the Deeside MF Open Meet

Johne's in Cattle

Tim Geraghty* discussed Johne's at the Deeside Monitor Farm Open Meeting, highlighting why decision making is essential to control the disease.

'Of all the disease conditions we regularly deal with in suckler herds, Johne's management faces the greatest challenges.' — Tim Geraghty

Johne's control needs constant reflection and ongoing decision-making.

Setting your goal

What is your goal for Johne's? Is it:

- To limit clinical cases
- To stop clinical cases and significantly reduce its spread
- To start getting clean heifers coming through
- To get accredited — a certificate that says your stock is particularly low risk for Johne's

***Tim** is a UK and European veterinary specialist in Cattle Health and Production

The financial cost in cows

Tim noted the financial impact of Johne's in suckler herds:

- Calves from Johne's-affected cows can be 20 to 60 kilos lighter at weaning
- Cows are less feed efficient
- Culled cow weights are lighter
- Cows take more feed to get to cull weight
- Infected cows are more susceptible to nutritional stress at any time of year
- During the breeding season, cows can lose fertility, mainly through poor feed efficiency
- In an advanced state, cows get clinically unwell
- Affected cows develop weight loss and diarrhoea and can no longer enter the food chain
- Cows are either euthanised or die on farm: the value of the cull cow is lost
- A farmer has to pay for the carcass to be collected
- The cow contaminates her environment with the bug before she leaves the farm.



Tim Geraghty, in his element!

The impact & how it spreads

Symptoms in bulls

Symptoms in bulls are similar:

- Initially, a reduction in feed conversion efficiency
- As the disease progresses, his feed efficiency continually drops
- A bull will be eating the same amount but putting less flesh and weight on
- A bull works very hard, for a condensed period of time in circular systems: nutritional inefficiency has an impact on fertility performance
- Libido drops off and less energy is available for quality semen production
- Bulls that are shedding the bug can potentially infect a lot of young calves

And in calves

- Johne's is a very slow-developing condition
- Once the bug enters the calf, it sits quietly in the calf's lymph node, usually causing no trouble; the calf appears perfectly healthy
- The calf may be light because the dam is making less milk, not because it's unwell
- On average, it is four or five years before the Johne's infection progresses to the point of causing clinical problems or a positive test, but this is highly variable
- Over that time, the calf is very slowly deteriorating, but Johne's is not causing noticeable problems
- Blood testing for Johne's in the early stages does not reveal infection
- Shedding in the dung will be intermittent but progressing slowly

A resilient organism

'The bug that causes Johne's is dissimilar to most other bugs we deal with. Johne's bugs are resilient; they can contaminate the environment for years.' — Tim Geraghty

Farmers are battling a natural variation in susceptibility:

- Some animals can meet a small level of infection when young, become resilient and never develop the disease
- Susceptible animals in the same group will become ill at a much younger age
- If they've had a very large dose at a young age, they'll tend to get the disease very early
- Some clinical cases emerge by one year old.

The routes to infection

- The main risk is faecal transfer — the bug spreads in dung, getting into the environment and vulnerable calves
- A shedding cow can infect not only her own calf very easily, but any other calf in the pen or in close proximity
- A bull is in beside a farm's young calves, and can often be one of the only bought-in animals in the herd
- Johne's can also spread across the placenta; in colostrum, and in the milk.

Control & risk reduction

Critical questions for the farmer

- How regularly are we buying in animals?
- Are we selling breeding stock or producing our own breeding stock — females or bulls?

Planning and testing

- An annual blood test of breeding stock over 2 years old is a typical start point, and testing frequency can go up or down in from there, depending on the goals for the herd.
- Build a control programme around how this disease physically works on farm — and therefore what's a sensible amount of time, effort and money to invest in control.

Reducing the risk

- An on-farm risk assessment for Johne's disease with your vet can bring a lot of benefit, by highlighting any areas where rapid spread of the disease might be able to occur.
- This will focus on purchased stock, exactly how and when high risk animals are identified and removed from the herd, how calving pens are managed and how young calves, especially replacement heifers, are managed and grouped.

Further information

Information on Johne's is available from online sources, including:

[NADIS on Johne's in cattle](#)

[SRUC on Johne's Disease](#)

and

Scottish Government's

[Johne's disease: how to spot and report the disease](#)

Or contact your local vet practice.



Johne's infected cow-NADIS webpage

Johne's - A Deeside Monitor Farm Case Study



Tim says, 'Duncan and Claire have been exemplary in how they've approached Johne's.

'They've been in expansion mode throughout the Monitor Farm process.

Where land has become available, they've taken that. Their immediate challenge is then that they need stock to convert that land to profit quickly. That has led to bringing in stock, with small numbers purchased and also a much larger number taken on board through a rental agreement.

The priority for their business over this time window has been expansion. Their disease control programme must conform to that, recognising that any added animals increases the risk. of Johne's.'

Tim notes, 'The Morrisons have been testing annually for eight years now: 1,500 individual tests to date.

'Over that time they've identified 25 animals that should leave the herd and have also been very diligent to take out their followers, so the daughters of any high-risk animal have also left the herd.

'They're largely an outdoor calving system, so that reduces risk.

'They should be proud that, to date, they've not had a Johne's positive offspring from one of their home-bred cows.

'They make sure testing and good practice in minimising risk are not forgotten even when they're busy with other priorities.

'I would hope that they are well on the way to achieving a very low risk Johne's status and in time, are able to certify that through the health scheme.'





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