

## Developing a BLV Control Program on Dairy Farms

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### Summary Points

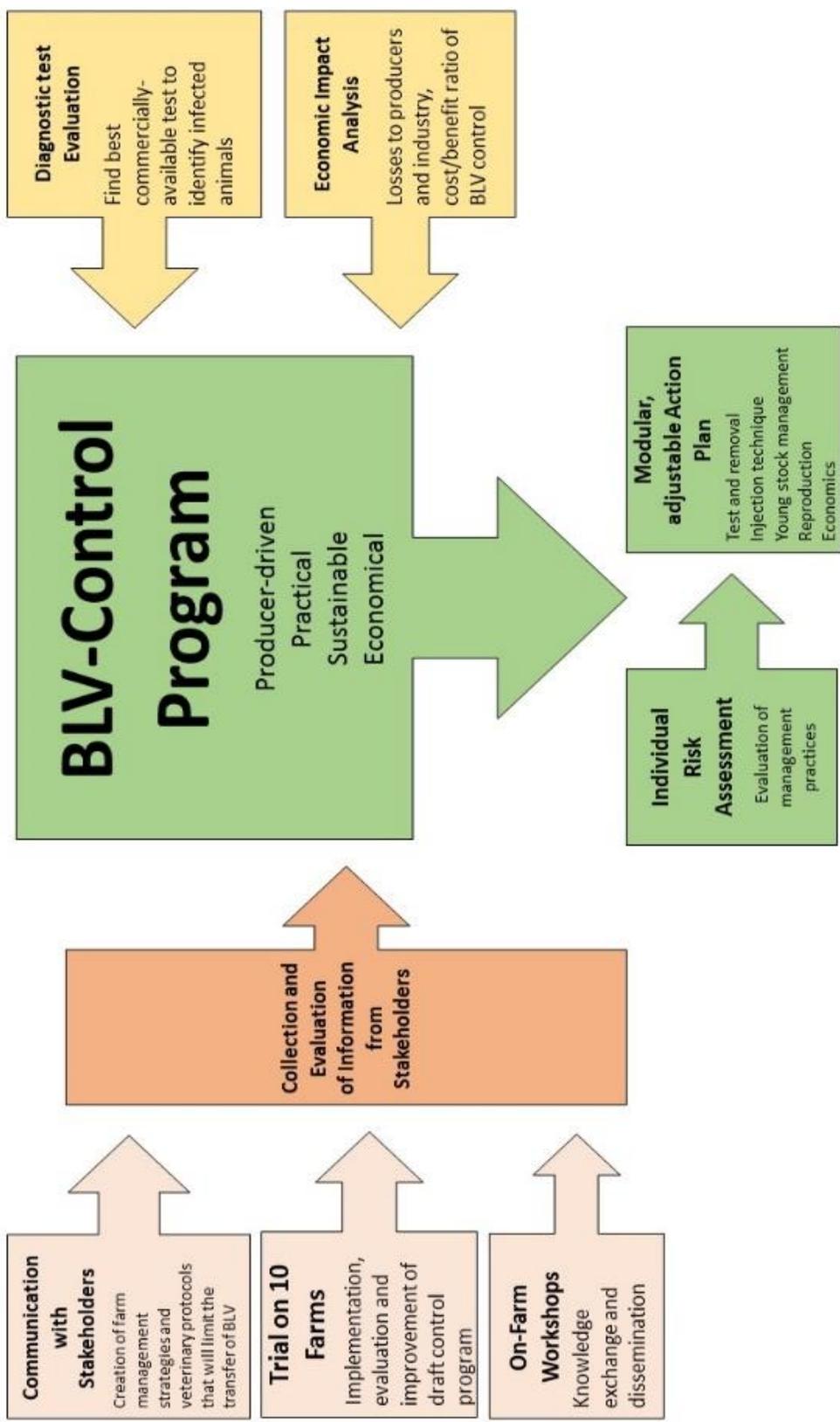
- Bovine Leukemia Virus (BLV) is a transmissible disease that impacts production and animal health
- Developing a control program can help to reduce or eliminate the disease
- Working together will help us develop an effective, sustainable control program

### Why is this important?

- 1) Leukosis, also known as Enzootic Bovine Leukemia, is caused by a virus called Bovine Leukemia Virus (BLV). Once an animal is infected by the virus, it will be infected for life. BLV infects white blood cells and causes cancer in about 5% of infected animals. Side effects of infection include: a weaker immune system, milk production decrease, decreased cow longevity and increased probability of culling. In Canada, 90% of dairies have encountered BLV.
- 2) Canada is not the only country facing BLV. Every country with a dairy industry has to cope with infected cattle.

However, many countries in Europe, as well as Australia and New Zealand established nationwide eradication programs and are now free of the disease. Therefore, export of animals and animal-derived products to these countries is restricted to test-negative animals.

Leukosis is a production limiting disease and control programs in North America are long overdue. Not only is it important to reduce financial losses to producers and industry, but it is also important to improve animal welfare and public perception about animal care. Infected animals do suffer and that alone should be enough reason to tackle the disease. On top of that, and because the virus is potentially cancer-causing, consumers might question the safety of dairy products.



## What are we going to do?

As there is neither a vaccine nor a cure to this disease, a control program is the only logical way to address and handle this situation. Other countries have proven that eradication of the virus is achievable. We are therefore developing a control program that consists of a risk assessment and building an individual action plan that can be adjusted for individual needs, restrictions and opportunities. This creates a flexible solution as the risk assessment will evaluate a large variety of management practices on farm.

- As the virus is transmitted with white blood cells, the basic idea of all management strategies is to avoid the transmission of blood and/or blood cells from one animal to the other. This includes needles, syringes, dehorning and tagging equipment, colostrum and many other things.
- Once the action plan is established, the goal is to prevent new infections within the herd and gradually replace test-positive animals with test-negative ones and thereby creating a BLV-free herd. The available diagnostic tests are reliable which makes identifying infected animals very easy.

In order to create an achievable, time-effective and sustainable control program we will communicate with producers, veterinarians and other stakeholders. We are planning to meet in small groups and discuss risk assessment, management changes and other related topics in order to create an effective control program. This control program will then be tested on 10 farms in order to evaluate its practicality and find and address bottleneck problems and challenges.

Another goal is to determine what motivates producers to learn more about BLV and participate in a specific control program on their farm. This will allow us to reach as many producers as possible and effectively implement control plans. We are planning group discussions, on-farm workshops and one-on-one interviews in order to get an idea about the current situation, learn about motivational factors and inform as many people as possible.

## What does this mean?

We need your help. It is time to raise awareness and start doing something about BLV. We cannot solve this problem on our own, we need your support. Please feel free to contact us (see information below) if you need more information or if you want to help develop a successful control program.

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The authors would like to thank ALMA and Alberta Milk for their financial support.