

With Scotland and Ireland both pursuing national control programmes for BVD, some vets say it is vital producers in England and Wales take on the importance of BVD control. **Katie Lomas** reports on two projects in the north of England to see what is already being done at a regional level.

# Taking action against BVD

## ► Tackling gaps in understanding on-farm

IN North Yorkshire, a project, undertaken by Bishopton Vets, has been set up to evaluate the occurrence and control of the disease in a group of beef and dairy herds in the area.

It has found more than half of the cattle tested were either persistently infected (PI) or had been exposed to the virus.

The Nidderdale BVD project involved 20 farms, all of which had their initial BVD status assessed by blood sampling youngstock and additionally supported for dairy farms, from a bulk-milk tank sample.

Four of the herds involved were found to have PI animals (two dairy and two beef) while a further 10 herds (four dairy and six beef) were found to have been exposed to the virus. Only seven of the herds sampled showed no evidence of BVD.

Jonathan Statham, of Bishopton Vets, says: "Annual testing of a proportion of the herd's youngstock is an essential part of monitoring BVD control measures.

"Control plans including a vaccination policy must include an annual booster for all breeding stock. Heifers must receive a primary course of two injections prior to service, however many herds fail to achieve correct timing of administration of vaccination and remain vulnerable to BVD challenge.

"Breeders must also consider all biosecurity risks from neigh-

bouring stock and ensure boundaries are made secure."

Mr Statham says vaccination should be considered if cattle are likely to come into contact with animals from other holdings and all bought-in replacements and bulls must be screened before entering the herd.

"On one of the farms that had previously been free of BVD we found a PI animal. The farm had periodically allowed vaccination to lapse by not giving boosters at the correct time and not always giving heifers two injections before being served. It was interesting the PI animal was a calved heifer showing no signs of ill health."

### Northumberland

The project, managed by Raft Solutions, has been replicated in Northumberland through Alnorthumbria Veterinary Group. This project was only set up five months ago but progress so far is encouraging says Jenny Hull, a vet with Alnorthumbria and project co-ordinator.

"All farms invited have participated, and the aims we published have been well received," she says.

"So far all farms have been tested to find out their BVD disease status, and we have begun the task of monitoring herds, and ensuring vaccination is effective."

The 30 farms all know their BVD status and all those with PI's have undergone herd testing to find and remove those animals.

She says, however, many farmers are unaware they may

have a BVD threat in their herd.

"Their cattle may be living with disease and poor health, while the herd's productivity declines, and infection remains, free to pass beyond the farm itself. This gap of understanding is a significant aspect of the threat the disease presents."

She adds for Northumberland, control is even more significant as Scotland has announced a policy to eradicate BVD over the next few years. Consequently English sellers need to maintain confidence in their stock to continue trading across the Border.

## BVD key information

■ **BVD**: Causes a variety of outcomes, including abortion, infertility, calf respiratory and enteric diseases, and most dramatically of all, the fatal mucosal disease

■ **Persistently Infected (PI) cattle**: BVD persists in herds because the disease is

maintained by a small population of PI cattle. These become a reservoir of BVD in the herd

■ **Vaccination protocols**: Guidelines recommend an annual booster for all breeding stock and for heifers a primary course of two injections, three weeks apart, prior to service

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## Case study: Andrew Fisher

BEEF producer Andrew Fisher, of Pateley Bridge, says he was keen to become involved in the project Bishopton Vets Project.

"This is a disease that's on the increase so it makes sense to do everything possible to avoid infection. We blood tested the entire calf crop and a percentage of the cows.

"The results showed some cattle had been exposed to BVD and a neighbour was found to have a PI animal in his herd," says Mr Fisher, who breeds British White cattle and

supplies finished animals to a leading retail outlet in Harrogate.

There were three calves in the herd which had been exposed to BVD and some cows had been losing time. All the cattle in the herd have now been vaccinated and all will receive an annual booster.

"It's not only important from a herd health point of view but it's also a bonus when it comes to selling stock. At £2 per vaccination it's peanuts compared with the problems that can be avoided."



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