

Three-quarters of dairy herds exposed to IBR



JOHN EVESON

According to Jonathan Statham, IBR has been cited for a 15% drop in conception rates as well as reduced milk production.

By Rhian Price

A recent study revealed that almost three-quarters of UK dairy herds in England and Wales have been exposed to infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR).

A total of 1,800 bulk milk samples were tested for the disease in MSD's subsidised Dairy Check survey. Results showed that 70% of those herds were positive for IBR exposure.

Speaking at Livestock 2012, Jonathan Statham from Bishopton Vets said IBR was a "real threat" to the UK dairy industry.

Mr Statham said IBR negatively affected fertility and had been cited for a 15% drop in conception rates,

as well as reduced milk production.

He said a study from the Netherlands showed IBR caused a 9.5-litre milk yield depression in infected dairy animals when it was first encountered within the herd, although this was not sustained throughout the whole lactation.

Mr Statham said there were a number of proactive measures producers could undertake to reduce the risk of contracting the virus, including ensuring they buy replacements that are IBR-free.

This could often be a game of "Russian roulette", he said, but added that buying heifers through Cattle Health Certification Standards (CHeCS) would ensure animals were IBR-free.

He said investing money and

BENEFITS OF VACCINATION

Robert Graham

* Dairy farmer Robert Graham decided to "live with" the fact that he had low IBR levels within his herd, but later paid a high price.

"In autumn last year we had a clinical outbreak and within 24 hours, 20% of our herd was infected. Youngstock and higher yielding cows were infected, so from that point we started vaccination," he added.

Shortly after vaccination clinical signs subsided, reproductive efficiency recovered from 10% to 18% and yields also increased.

time into putting a vaccination programme in place to cover the whole herd was vital.

"But this only works if you use them at the right time and in the right animals, and if you look after the medication properly," he said.

This, he said, included making sure medication was stored at the right temperature and was given at the correct dose rates.

Another key management technique for controlling IBR was supporting heifers through the transition into the herd to reduce stress – a known cause of IBR. "Heifers present an opportunity to clean your herd up, so if you protect them and use vaccination you can reduce the risk in the herd over time," he said.