



A campaign to promote the control and prevention of BVD in cattle

# Biosecurity key to effective BVD control

**B**ovine viral diarrhoea (BVD) is a contagious viral disease of cattle, which can spread from animal to animal much like a common cold in humans.

It affects both beef and dairy cattle across the world, with an estimated 60-90 per cent of the global cattle population positive for exposure to the virus. Although widespread, it can frequently lurk hidden and unseen for months and even years in a herd, leading to significant performance and economic losses.

Many BVD infections are transient infections (TI). There may be no outward clinical signs of BVD but there is a significant impact on herd fertility, calf health and foetal losses. At the same time, if a foetus is exposed to the virus in the first 30-120 days of gestation, it will be born a Persistently Infected animal (PI), which may or may not



Roger Scott

survive but, if it does, will shed virus into the environment throughout its lifetime.

Vet Roger Scott, of Scott Mitchell and Associates, Hexham, says: "As is clear, once the BVD virus is in your herd, it can cause serious losses, affecting many areas of herd health. So while it would be easy to recommend it is prevented from entering the herd, that is some-



A critical area to scrutinise is farm biosecurity, says vet Roger Scott.

times easier said than done."

Testing to establish herd BVD status is the first step and this can be done in a number of ways; your vet will advise you on the best approach for your circumstances.

Then, once a control programme is under way with all identified PIs removed, a critical area to scrutinise is biosecurity, Mr Scott says.

"Bio-security is often overlooked or taken for granted but is actually very important to underpin any surveillance and vaccination programme," he adds. "Without it, you are asking for trouble."

A simple list of questions can provide a good starting point:

■ **Sourcing cattle:** Do you buy cattle of known BVD/health status, eg. CHeCS accredited/

## Signs BVD may be in your herd:

- Do you have more empty cows than normal?
- Are there some animals which are not thriving for no apparent reason?
- Do this year's calves have more pneumonia or scour than you expect?
- Do these calves, or other sick calves, respond poorly to veterinary treatment?
- Have there been some unexplained abortions?
- Have you seen birth defects in calves this year? If you can answer yes to one or more of these, then speak to your vet about BVD testing

BVD virus monitored and free?

- Do you have an open or a closed herd, eg. breed own replacements?
- Do you buy bulls in?
- Do you have neighbours with stock? If so, is there any natural boundary or three metre gap eg. double fencing between them?
- Have you tested your herd for BVD? If so, do you monitor them on a regular basis?
- Do you use a BVD vaccine? If so, do you use it in a structured way, eg. part of herd plan and always at the right time ahead of the onset of pregnancy?

■ Do you operate any form of biosecurity/hygiene protocol for visitors, eg. footbathing?

■ If you monitor and find a PI do you keep it on-farm, what do you do?

■ Do you have an ongoing problem with other diseases, eg. pneumonia or scours?

Mr Scott says: "Sitting down and working through these with your vet will show any areas needing improvement; its often only when they are discussed in detail that you realise maybe a bit of complacency has slipped in."