

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

BVD
zero

Testing times for BVD control

The first step for any producer aiming to control BVD (bovine viral diarrhoea) in their herd is to understand if the virus is active in the herd, advises George Caldow, of SAC Consulting Veterinary Services, St Boswells.

He says: "Without this information, it is impossible to plan and develop an action plan to match a herd's own unique circumstances.

"Best practice is to upgrade your biosecurity measures and review your BVD vaccination regime. You will need to monitor its success and that is why an element of testing will continue to be important."

If tests do reveal BVD, your vet will advise you on the best course of action.

Check test

A check test tells you if stock have had contact with an animal persistently infected with the BVD virus (known as a PI).



Jonathan Stockton

For most herds this is a relatively cheap and effective exercise.

Ear tagging

An alternative approach which can be used to show freedom from infection or to help you track down PI animals, is to use tissue, or ear tag testing, to test all calves born in the herd.

"Sampling can be part of your routine and you can identify and remove virus carriers rapidly. The down side of this is for herds which have BVD under control, it is more expensive than the check test."

Whole herd approach

All animals in the herd can also be tissue or blood tested for virus regardless of age. This approach can be taken where the herd has been shown to be affected by BVD by either of the two previous testing approaches.

Bulk milk testing

A bulk milk test can be used to look for BVD antibodies. Many herds will be positive from this test and it means there are cows which have been infected at some time in their life; it does not mean BVD is active in the herd at the time of sampling.

"You can combine individual samples from first lactation heifers to be tested. This can be a useful second test when the bulk

tank is positive for antibody to BVD," says Mr Caldow.

Cow-side tissue test

A relatively new cow-side BVD antigen test, called the SNAP BVD Test, claims to detect PI animals. The test takes a simple ear notch or blood sample and delivers on-the-spot results.

"The challenge is to use these tests selectively to provide the best value for you in controlling BVD in your herd," says Mr Caldow.

"BVD is a major cause of financial and performance losses for dairy and beef herds and is one that can be easily sorted out. Determining your BVD status and planning an ongoing action plan will soon deliver improved herd health and economic benefits."

Jonathan Stockton, of Kingsway Vets, Skipton, is a great advocate of informed choice when it comes to testing. "Calf crop testing works well for some herd set ups but not others, and, of course, there is always the issue of cost to

BVD checklist

A SIMPLE checklist of points to consider may help you and your vet work out which approach most suits your herd's situation:

- Do you consider it a closed herd?
- Do you buy-in cows, heifers or calves regularly?
- Do you buy-in or loan bulls?

- Does your grazing pasture neighbour other herds' grazing?
- Do you sell calves or youngstock at market?
- Is calf health an issue (poor doers, stillbirths, respiratory disease)?
- Is cow fertility less than expected?

consider, so ear notch testing all calves is not always the most cost effective approach.

"Should you suspect BVD is a problem in your herd, you need to identify which animals are PIs and remove them as soon as possible. Grouped bulk milk or blood sampling will help identify groups of animals to then test further," he adds.

"There is little doubt it is a fairly involved and expensive approach but removing PIs is the foundation of any BVD control strategy.

"From there, the best ap-

proach for your herd will depend on many factors (see *checklist*). For example, if you regularly sell stock at market, ear tagging will allow you to sell tagged cattle safe in the knowledge they are BVD free, so potentially securing a premium.

"Ear tagging is more costly than screening a group of heifers via bulk milk testing, but one approach may work best for one herd, while the other for someone with slightly different circumstances," Mr Stockton says.