



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

BVD infection – A complex picture for farmers and vets

Bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD) is the most common viral disease affecting dairy and breeding beef cattle in Europe. Yet recent research throughout Europe found it can be hard to spot on-farm and it can often go unseen for months or years.

According to the vets interviewed, abortion, diarrhoea and infertility are the most common signs of infection. However there was a wide range within this, with UK vets rating infertility most highly while vets in France stated mucosal disease (which manifests as diarrhoea and leads to death of the animal) is the most evident clinical sign.

Italian vets said diarrhoea was the most commonly seen sign, while Spanish vets rated abortion first.

There were similar differences of opinion among the farmers who were questioned.

Abortion, diarrhoea and infertility were again the most commonly stated signs but observations such as malforma-



Tom Clarke

tions (France), respiratory signs (France, Germany, UK, Italy and Spain), early embryonic death (Germany, Belgium, Netherlands) and decreased milk production (Netherlands) were also frequently mentioned.

Vet Tom Clarke, from Dorset-based Synergy Farm Health, a member of the XL Vet Group says: "BVD can cause a range of clinical signs which can differ from one herd to another, making diagnosis a challenge.

"Although the veterinary profession has a good understand-

ing of the virus, when it acts as a door opener for another disease, the picture can be more complex," Mr Clarke says.

"For example, the immune-suppressive effects of circulating virus in a calf shed can increase the secondary problems of pneumonia and diarrhoea."

The research also revealed that Belgian and Dutch vets felt it was a disease which affects the general immune system, while vets from Spain and Germany felt it was more closely linked to the reproductive system.

"Whether this is down to differing strains of BVD around Europe or how BVD is picked up is hard to say, but the comparison is important not least because it shows BVD can affect all areas of herd health," he adds.

Protecting stock

"BVD is a threat to all cattle producers, with the market research showing vets believe more than 80 per cent of the cattle population is at risk of infection."

The study, which also exam-

ined vet and farmer attitudes to BVD, showed almost all vets believe cattle should be vaccinated against it, yet use at farm level is highly variable. In fact, studies show vaccination rates vary from 10 per cent in Belgium to 36 per cent in UK with an EU average of 25 per cent.

What can explain the difference between vet awareness of the threat of BVD and apparent low levels of vaccination?

The most common reason given by farmers was they had not experienced BVD in their herd previously. Almost as frequently mentioned was that ear notch or blood testing to monitor virus exposure are preferred or there had been no BVD in the local area.

"Certainly, regional [Belgium and Netherlands] and national [Germany] BVD eradication programmes, plus a much stricter approach to herd bio-security, may explain some of the reduced use of vaccine as the disease is brought under control on a regional, rather than farm level.

"Even if a herd does not have a

Regional data showing seroprevalence (exposure to the virus):

UK: 90 to 95 per cent of herds have been exposed to the virus

Ireland: 98 per cent

Germany: 60 per cent

France: 60 per cent

Italy: 62 per cent

Spain: 80 per cent

history of BVD there should be a system of surveillance in place. BVD can get into a herd and go unseen initially but it will inevitably lead to significant and costly health issues," he adds.

Vaccination

The survey also aimed to establish why non-vaccinating farmers make the move to commence a vaccination programme. Responding to a positive test was the most common answer, although implementation of a regional eradication programme was also raised as a reason why

a herd may start vaccinating.

"What this shows is the decision to start controlling BVD with a vaccination programme is rarely proactive; it tends to be in response to something outside the farmer's control," says Mr Clarke.

"Not establishing the BVD status of your own herd and understanding the risk to stock is a risky strategy to take, which could result in an infected herd and all the losses and long-term damage which accompany it.

"At the most basic level, all dairy and beef producers should aim to discuss BVD control with their vet. The testing is reliable, herd surveillance is easy and control can be achieved within 18 months with an organised approach.

"A vet-led plan involving testing, biosecurity, vaccination and ongoing surveillance is the best approach to establishing your herd's status and maintaining BVD control," Mr Clarke says.