

Warning after study reveals BVD danger

■ More than half cattle in survey affected

by Mike Bridgen

A STUDY of 20 North Yorkshire herds discovered more than half the cattle were persistently infected (PI) by – or had been exposed to – Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD).

The disease is widespread in the UK, and the Scottish government has urged its producers to only buy animals certified BVD-free or from herds in

accredited free schemes. Northern livestock producers have been urged to act and only buy BVD-free animals to avoid problems with cross-border trading.

Ripon-based Bishopton vets studied beef and dairy herds in Nidderdale. Another trial on 30 farms in the Coquet Valley, Northumberland, will report in May.

BVD can cause heavy financial losses – immune systems can be weakened leaving animals prone to diseases such as mastitis in adult cattle or pneumonia and scours in youngstock.

Infection during mid pregnancy can cause abnormal eye or brain development, and embry-

onic death in early pregnancy. Calves become PI when their immature immune system fails to recognise BVD as “foreign”. They may appear normal but represent an enormous infection challenge to the rest of the herd.

The study involved blood testing young stock with an additional bulk milk tank sample on dairy farms.

Two beef and two dairy herds were found to have PI animals, while another four dairy and six beef herds had been exposed to it. Only seven showed no evidence of BVD.

Jonathan Statham, of Bishopton Vets, said annual testing of a proportion of a herd’s youngstock was essential.

Vaccination must include an annual booster for all breeding stock with heifers receiving two injections prior to service.

However, many herds fail to vaccinate at the correct time and remain vulnerable to BVD.

Breeders should assess biosecurity risks from neighbouring stock and ensure boundaries are secure.

Mr Statham said: “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.”

Three of the ten beef herds were already in cattle health

schemes but only five claimed to have “secure boundaries”.

Six had more than 200 head of cattle and of the herds, half purchased bulls and seven bought pregnant females frequently or occasionally without screening for BVD.

British White beef producer Andrew Fisher, of Pateley Bridge, had his entire calf crop and a percentage of cows blood-tested. It showed some had been exposed to BVD and a neighbour was found to have a PI animal in his herd.

The herd has now been vaccinated and will receive an annual booster.

Mr Fisher said: “It’s not only

Continued on Page 3

Alert over BVD risk after Yorkshire study

Continued from Page 1

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."

Dairy farmer Mark Nicholson, of Ripon, has vaccinated his herd since 2006.

Initially, he was unaware that unborn calves in the early stages of pregnancy are not protected against BVD until four weeks after the second BVD vaccine jab.

"This meant that for three years we turned heifers out to

grass in early stages of pregnancy carrying unprotected fetuses with unvaccinated neighbouring stock," he said.

"As a result we had two PI calves born in autumn 2008, and in the spring of 2009, had an unusual outbreak of pneumonia in three to four-month-old dairy heifers."

The two heifers eventually made it into the milking herd and were only detected when Bishopton Vets ran a bulk milk test. They were eventually tracked down and destroyed.

● The project was managed by raft Solutions and supported by Lantra Landskills as part of the Rural Development Programme for England.



CATTLE TESTED: Andrew Fisher, of Pateley Bridge, with his British White cows