

Pennine farmers link up to eradicate BVD

A GROUP of 30 Northumberland farmers are taking part in a project to ultimately eliminate Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) from their herds.

Set up in the upper Coquet Valley in September last year, it is already well on the way to creating a disease-free area in which they, and buyers, can be confident of their stock.

Jenny Hull, project co-ordinator and a vet with Alnthumbria Veterinary group which has led the project, said: "So far, all farms have been tested to find out their BVD disease status, and we have begun the task of monitoring herds, and ensuring vaccination is effective."

Simple colour categories were used to identify their disease status. Green farms have no active BVD, amber farms have one or two animals that have been exposed to the

virus, and red farms have active BVD with persistently infected animals (PIs).

All red farms have undergone herd testing to find and remove the PI animals.

It involves testing the whole calf crop and any cows that haven't had a calf – this identifies a PI cow, because a PI cow cannot give birth to a non-PI calf.

Those farms are now using BVD notch tags, supplied by Allflex, to tag and test all calves born in the next 12 months.

Jenny is currently designing BVD action plans tailored to each individual farm based on their disease risk.

"Working with your neighbours is part of any successful disease control programme," she said. "Everyone now understands that the disease is no respecter of boundaries, and how interlinked neigh-

bouring farms often are.

"Thanks to single fences, cattle crossing rivers, break-outs, and summering cattle away at grass parks, you are always at risk from your neighbour's disease status."

She has also worked hard to ensure that farmers vaccinate as efficiently and effectively as possible. This is a primary course of two injections, three weeks apart, of all breeding animals, including bulls.

Jenny believes this scheme will help to control BVD in the area, thanks to the spirit of co-operation between the farmers.

One of the biggest threats of BVD is farmers' ignorance of its presence in their herd.

For Northumberland, control is even more significant as Scotland has announced a policy to eradicate BVD over the next few years. Consequently English sellers

need to maintain confidence in their stock to be able to continue trading across the border.

This was one of the key reasons Northumberland was selected as a pilot area. The Coquet Valley – bounded by the Simonside Hills on one side and MoD ranges on the other – made a perfect control area.

Alnthumbria vets, who have been at the forefront of

the fight against the disease, are now encouraging all livestock farmers to collaborate and work together.

Jenny said: "I really would like to encourage farmers to work with their neighbours to help control BVD. To be successful, we also need to follow the lead of our national neighbours.

"Other countries such as Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Switzerland, Austria, Scotland and Republic of Ireland (voluntary phase) have eradication schemes in place."

Richard Booth, a vet from The Royal Veterinary College who specialises in BVD, has also been involved in the project, addressing meetings and talking to farmers involved in the study.

SAC (Scottish Agricultural College) has tested the samples and provided technical support.

The project has been supported by RDPE funding from One North East, via Lantra, Landskills North East and sponsored by Novartis Animal Health, SAC and Allflex.



TACKLING BVD: Vet Jenny Hull, project co-ordinator

Saucy Sally's
recipe for good forage