

Practical steps to help disease control

Huge changes are embracing the tagging industry, writes **Hermione Foster**, as regulatory measures speed up rationalisation and increase competition

As livestock identification grows on the back of regulatory controls, and commercial competition hots up, familiar names in the tagging industry are merging or being swallowed up. Such rationalisation has already left only a handful of players, led by two major global operators – and those suppliers who sell through the trade have to be light on their feet.

Francis Farrell, General Manager of Northern Ireland-based QuickTag (now part of ear tag manufacturer Datamars), says that QuickTag is working towards being a “one-stop shop”, offering any type of tag for any type of animal, in a bid to compete with direct sellers.

“We needed to team up with Datamars,” he said, “because of the speed and cost of the development of

the technology behind the tags. And we needed to become more than a supplier of ear tags. We already supply additional products such as drenchers, guns and boluses, but this move also provided us with the opportunity to supply even more products for the animal identification industry.

Cattle already have to be double tagged. “And after years of prevarication in the sheep industry, with farmers reluctant to buy the tags, it is now all about price and speed of delivery,” Mr Farrell says. “Tags provide a faster chain of communication and traceability.”

SQPs have the opportunity to boost sales and service, through tailored advice, industry awareness, and an independent approach, and should be pivotal in using this to help control the spread of

disease and manage livestock movement restrictions on a local level. New programmes are being developed that can help promote that sort of integrated approach.

BVD CONTROL

UK cattle vets have a fantastic opportunity to help farmers and their advisers take a significant step forward in controlling BVD and build demand for disease-free animals on a commercial scale, according to Dan Humphries from the XLVets practice Lambert, Leonard and May.

Speaking to delegates at the annual BCVA Congress in Leicestershire in October, he urged practitioners to embrace the BVD Check Tag initiative, for example, and work together to improve disease control across the UK. The initiative uses branded ear tags as part of a BVD status testing procedure. The tags show that an animal has been tested for BVD – either at birth or pre-movement – and provide an easily identifiable and highly visible prompt for calf buyers to check test results online before purchase.

“Tissue-testing for BVD is not a new concept, but BVD Check Tag does offer some significant new benefits,” Mr Humphries said. “The tags are easily identifiable, the testing scheme is backed up by a central, fully accessible web-based database that provides verification of a negative test result for the disease, and the whole process keeps vets involved with their farmer clients.”

The main aims are to improve the identification of

source farms and reduce the risks of persistently infected (PI) calves moving from unit to unit, thereby stemming the spread of the disease.

“The scheme is entirely voluntary with farmers first having to make the decision to use the tissue sample testing technology to initiate the process. The tags are available from a number of suppliers, with tissue analysis either done by the vet practice or through a central laboratory, depending on the type of tag used.

“Cost is estimated to be approximately £4-6/tag, which includes the laboratory testing and veterinary consultative input,” Dan Humphries said.

The scheme has been piloted through XLVets member practices, but other veterinary practices can now take advantage of it. The database is being hosted independently. It is just one example of how tagging can help to manage the threat of disease, from farm to abattoir, and on to fork.



Tagging helps disease control

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