

# Testing cattle for BVDV vital to health of herd

**B**OVINE Viral Diarrhoea Virus (BVDV), despite the name, doesn't often cause diarrhoea in adult cattle.

The main effects of it that we see are reduced fertility, abortions and general suppression of immunity that can lead to pneumonia, scour and other infectious disease.

The incidence of BVD is not fully known in the UK, but in recent years, most farmers have become aware of the disease and are now testing.

Many are already vaccinating, even if they do not fully understand the disease.

## BOVINE DIARRHOEA

**Pam Brown**, of Alnorthumbria Veterinary Group's Wooler branch, discusses BVDV



Over the past two years, using funding from Defra through AHDB and XLVets (UK) Ltd, Alnorthumbria Vets co-ordinated with other local practices to deliver a BVD scheme.

The key elements have been education of all farmers within the area, subsidised testing of cattle for exposure to BVD, and follow-up advice on how to proceed as a co-ordinated group of connected farms.

The areas that they have covered so far are the Coquet Valley in 2012, Forestburngate in 2013 and, from there, northwards to the Scottish border on the west of the A697.

For the past two years, Scotland has had its own compulsory BVD-testing programme, meaning that all herds must test annually to find out their status, and legally they cannot knowingly sell an infected animal

except direct to slaughter. It is hoped that a similar scheme will eventually be rolled out in England.

Alnorthumbria Vets have now tested 82 farms in the area. This involves blood sampling five nine- to 18-month-old unvaccinated animals from each separately-managed group (two groups on most farms).

The samples are tested for antibody to BVD, which at this age they will only have if they have been exposed to the disease and mounted an immune response. If only one or two out of ten calves test positive, it is unlikely that there is a persistently infected (PI) animal present

on the farm, but they might have been exposed to the infection through poor biosecurity, such as contact with a neighbour's cattle.

If four or more out of ten test positive, it can be assumed that a PI is present on farm.

The confusing part is that calves that test positive for antibody are not the ones to worry about – they have been exposed to the infection, but have mounted a healthy immune response. The worrying calves are those that are antibody negative – PI calves are unable to make antibodies.

On farms where they were suspicious of a PI, they then

tested all calves (plus adults with no calves in this group) for BVD virus, culled any that were positive and continued testing calves born on-farm for the next two years, using special ear tags that collect a sample of tissue to test.

Cattle cannot become PIs – they are born this way when the dam is infected early in pregnancy. This is why, vital to the control of BVD, is vaccination of breeding cattle before going to the bull.

Of the 11 positive farms, including store buyers, it was found only 45 per cent were vaccinating properly.

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