

BVD: Why farms must collaborate

by Mike Bridgen

COLLABORATION between farmers is key to tackling BVD – and a host of other animal diseases.

That was the key finding in a project to combat Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) on farms in the Coquet Valley, Northumberland.

Jenny Hull, from the Alnthumbria Veterinary Group, managed the project, which involved 37 farms.

She said: “The biggest lesson learnt by far is that we need collaboration between farmers in order to tackle the disease. There is only so much we can do, farm by farm.

“Success comes when we group farms together to tackle infectious disease – the same logic applies with sheep scab and numerous other diseases as well.”

The project also showed just how inter-linked farms are, with only two of the 37 having “safe” boundaries.

Jenny said: “‘Safe’ indicates that they were either double-fenced or had natural three-metre gaps.

“The major problem with this concerning BVD is nose to nose contact across fences. One farm, bordered as many as seven other farms with single fences, reiterating the importance of a collaborative eradication effort.”

Alnthumbria Veterinary Group began the project in autumn last year to discover the disease status of the area, map the disease, educate farmers and land-owners, and compile tailored action plans to protect the farms, both individually and collectively from the disease.

The results were similar to what has been found in Scotland, with one third of

farms being positive. Of those, some were already vaccinating but not correctly.

Vaccination should be two doses, three weeks apart followed by a booster every 12 months within 14 months. Farmers should not forget to also vaccinate bulls. The vaccines must be in date and kept cool.

The established BVD risk factors include:

- Brought-on cattle – replacements, heifers, stores, cows, bulls, set-on calves, returns from sales and shows;
- Bulls – new, shared, hired, escaped;
- Break-outs, break-ins and fences.

Looking to the future of BVD in the Coquet Valley, Jenny said: “It is so important that we get the positive farms clear and keep the valley clear. This relies on continued co-operation between farms.

“We will re-test farms each year and follow up year-on-year to track their progress and what has been learnt.”

● Many farmers already adopt BVD management strategies as part of herd health and cattle health schemes.

Now Fearing, in conjunction with SAC, has launched a “tag and test” service that allows farmers to take tissue samples from newborn calves and identify persistently infected animals within only a few days.

The Geno tags collect a sample of ear tissue in a hermetically sealed, tamper-proof container with a unique identifier to ensure full traceability.

The samples are sent by post to the SAC laboratories for analysis and the results are returned within five working days to both the farmer and his vet.