

It's simple – producers can follow four steps towards successful BVD eradication

Cattle industry campaign to eliminate BVD

All cattle producers should be working towards BVD eradication. Scotland and Ireland are some way along this route. The rest of Britain needs to follow. Although more than routine vaccination is required, the blueprint involves just four simple steps.

text **Karen Wright**

A BVD eradication plan for England has been made a priority by the Animal Health and Welfare Group. Supported by Defra and the EU's Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE), a stakeholder group, with representatives from across the industry, has developed its blueprint on Animal Health Ireland's four key steps



Herds should work towards BVD eradication

BVD monitoring

NML is one of the partners in the national BVD eradication stakeholder group. It offers comprehensive monitoring tests for beef and dairy herds:

- Tag and Test – calves are tagged soon after birth and a tissue sample is tested for BVD antigen
- Blood tests – for dairy and beef cattle
- Bulk milk tests – ad-hoc or routine test using PCR, which will detect the virus

in the herd. Antibody monitoring on bulk milk samples is also available.

- Individual milk sample tests – antibody tests on ad-hoc samples or samples collected for routine milk recording.

➔ For more details see www.nmr.co.uk

BVD is a simple disease to eradicate

Eliminating BVD from the 150-cow mainly Holstein dairy herd has improved overall cow and youngstock health, according to Ross-on-Wye-based producer Robert Davies. "Due to TB losses we bought in some stock 13 years ago and, despite taking great care, we also bought in disease problems," says Robert.

About four years ago pneumonia among the calves was a real problem despite routine vaccination. "Our vets, Chaseview, with the help of the Zoetis vet suggested we tested for BVD. We had been vaccinating for BVD, but we couldn't be 100% sure we hadn't got a PI animal in the herd."

During the next 12 months all youngstock, newborn calves and cows were blood tested and results showed up two PI cows and a PI calf. "We got rid of these and any offspring – it's important

that you have good records to identify these animals. For us it meant culling six animals, which was hard when we were trying to build up cow numbers, but it had to be done. We continued to vaccinate and we now monitor the herd. We're starting quarterly bulk milk testing so we can monitor BVD antibody trends and we can then act quickly if there are any deviations."

The herd has been BVD free for the past two years. Robert is seeing health benefits. "We now have very few, if any, cases of pneumonia. I am sure that the herd's immunity is much better and the stock is able to cope better with any disease challenges."

"Also, I believe that if it's possible to control an endemic disease then we should be doing so as a matter of good practise. While diseases like TB are



Chaseview vet Nigel Misselbrook (left) and Robert Davies: "BVD is easy to eradicate"

very frustrating, BVD isn't. It's easy to eradicate and results are quick to appear."

towards eradication. The first step is informing the industry, starting with a 'BVD-free' mailer recently sent to all producers and detailing the campaign actions and goals. Also under this 'BVD-free' banner and running alongside the group's work is a campaign co-ordinated by XL Vets that is training vets and advisers on BVD eradication. Already 84 practices and more than 450 producers have committed to the recommended BVD control plan through this work.

"While we are currently lagging behind Scotland and Ireland in our BVD eradication plans, we are gaining momentum in England," says industry BVD group secretary and DairyCo vet Elizabeth Berry.

"Our purpose is to get all producers to appreciate the threat of BVD entering their herds and the risk of having a BVD carrier. No amount of vaccination will alter the status of these animals. We're not saying that there isn't a place for vaccination, but there's more to eradication than this in many cases."

Four steps

So what are the four steps to BVD eradication? "The first is planning," explains Dr Berry. "Talk to your vet about BVD control. Too many producers think they have the disease under control with once a year vaccination. But if there's a carrier – a persistently infected (PI) animal – in the herd then they will never achieve eradication."



Elizabeth Berry: "More to BVD eradication than vaccination"

Step two is 'investigating'. "It sounds so obvious, but producers need to be 100% confident in the herd's BVD status. If you've bought in cattle and didn't know their status then you can't be 100% sure you don't have a BVD carrier animal that is busy passing on the virus to herd mates or new-born calves. And even if the herd is truly closed risks still exist, say from contact with infected animals at shows or with neighbouring cattle.

Step three is controlling the disease. "If the herd is BVD-free then discuss how best to keep it this way. Herds that are not BVD free need to identify and cull PI animals – these animals cannot be cured and no amount of vaccination will alter their BVD status."

The sooner a BVD animal is identified the better, which is why the Tag and Test service, that tests a tissue sample when a young calf is tagged, is so successful.

Within a few days a PI calf can be identified.

Following vet advice, vaccination may be part of the control programme.

Step four is monitoring. "This is vital," adds Dr Berry. "Herds should be screened at least annually as disease status can change even if the herd is theoretically closed. A bulk milk test is cost-effective here, but it is important to also screen young stock at about nine months old using a blood test before introducing them to rest of the herd."

The BVD stakeholder group has set targets. "We aim to interact – through activities like training and workshops – with 4,500 producers and interested industry parties during the next 12 months. We'd like to see at least 10% of England's dairy and beef producers commit to a BVD eradication plan by the end of March 2014." |

Plan – investigate – control – monitor

Websites for information:

www.bvdcontrol.co.uk – website

developed by the BVD stakeholder group

action@bvd.co.uk – information on training and workshops from Raft Solutions

www.rvc.ac.uk/bvd – technical information on BVD