

## BVD campaign aims to 'stamp out' disease

# Is it time you tackled BVD?

With £5.7 million now available to producers in England to help them tackle BVD, what should you be doing to secure your slice of the funding and take a step closer towards becoming BVD free? We spoke to a leading cattle vet to find out more.

text **Rachael Porter**

**A** pot of money is now available to vets and producers in England to test for – and tackle – BVD. And as it's a case of 'when it's gone it's gone', NML vet Karen Bond is urging producers to talk to their vet and make sure they get their slice of funding – before it runs out.

"This is a vet-led initiative, so the start point for interested producers is their vet. Many practices are holding 'cluster' meetings to start the ball rolling. So get yourself on the guest list and get your bum on a seat," she says.

These meetings will outline the disease and its costs, both nationally and at farm level, and what sort of control strategies producers can implement. The meeting will also outline exactly what your vet can offer, including how much testing budget is available.

### Initial screening

Vet practices will get funding for each producer at the meeting and there is also funding for an initial farm visit and a check test for screening the herd's young stock.

This screening is the starting point for determining if BVD is present and whether further work – and indeed funding from the scheme – is required. During the farm visit, the specific BVD risk for your individual business will be discussed and a young stock screening test will be carried out.

"This screening or check test comprises 10 blood tests from 10 heifers. If it's negative, producers can be safe in the knowledge that BVD isn't in their herd and their focus should be on continued biosecurity measures and future young stock screening to ensure that they remain BVD free," says Dr Bond.

The results of this check test will drive the agenda for the second meeting. ]

A positive test – one that picks up evidence of exposure to BVD – will push the herd through to the next stage of the project. This involves a second farm visit to discuss the results and to plan and take steps to carry out a 'PI hunt' to establish the extent of infection and identify the animals excreting the virus. Funding to the value of £440 is available for the further testing required to find the PI animals.

This may cover the entire cost on some



*Karen Bond: "NML vets are happy to assist and advise on the best course of testing action, when it comes to finding PIs"*

units – it varies according to the herd size and set up.

"Again, specialist vet involvement and advice can help to make sure you get good value for money here. Every unit will require a different approach. The vets here at NML are happy to assist and advise on the best course of testing action.

"Not only will this ensure that the PI hunt is successful, but that it's also least cost – and least hassle – for both vet and producer," says Dr Bond.

### Testing strategy

Searching for PIs requires a good understanding of how the disease works and a clear testing strategy – utilising milk, blood and tissue testing – either individually or as a combination.

"It will be different for each herd. But the key is to pick the right strategy and take advantage of the funding.

"It really is a great opportunity to tackle

## UK BVD control schemes

### England

The project, which was launched in September 2018, encourages vets to work with dairy and beef clients to investigate BVD at farm level and to propose action plans to control and reduce and eliminate the disease.

This funding aims to engage with 50% of herds during the next 2.5 years. Producers are also encouraged to sign up to BVD Free.

### Scotland

Scotland's BVD eradication scheme, which is compulsory, has been running for six years – and with considerable success. Many herds now enjoy BVD-free status.

Since the introduction of the scheme, exposure to BVD has reduce across Scotland and the number of 'negative' herds has increased from 60% in 2012 to 90% in 2018.

### Wales

The Welsh BVD eradication scheme was launched in September 2017 and is linked to TB testing. During routine testing, five blood samples are taken from young stock and screened for BVD. If there is evidence of BVD then £400 is made available for a thorough PI hunt to be carried out.

To date, 6,000 units are participating in the scheme.



*BVD vaccination: immunisation has an important role to play*

an insidious, complicated and damaging disease head on.”

The package of funding alone is worth up to £1,000 per herd when testing, vet advice and visits, and the meetings are taken into account. The rewards of detecting, controlling and, ultimately, eradicating this disease are worth considerably more.

“The return on investment can be tenfold, particularly in larger herds with a significant disease problem,” says Dr Bond.

“This scheme gets to the root of the problem. There are some herds that vaccinate for BVD, but the disease is still there and circulating and causing sub-clinical disease and fertility issues.

“Vaccination has an important place, even in BVD-free herds, because it can protect the cattle from new infection – either from neighbouring cattle or virus carried in on shoes and wheels.

“And the unborn calf is exposed in pregnancy, and then becomes a PI calf, which is why heifers are vaccinated before they are served for the first time. But no vaccination is 100%, particularly if it is not stored and administered in the correct way. And it’s not effective on PI cows. So these need to be weeded out and sent on their way.

“PI calves, which act like virus factories, will continue to pump out infection. So these also need to go.

“BVD depresses cattle immunity and makes them more susceptible to other diseases, this is particularly evident in calves exposed to a PI. Herds that have PIs will tend to see problems with calf pneumonia and scour.

“These can be severe and response to treatment is usually poor. Often the first benefit that producers see when they remove their PIs is an improvement in calf health.”

### **Taking control**

Dr Bond stresses that understanding the disease – particularly how it ‘hides’ and spreads within the herd – is key to taking control. “The initial meetings are an eye opener for many producers. Many don’t realise, for example, that a PI cow will always have a PI calf.

“And the on-farm consultation is invaluable because every herd and unit is different, and a bespoke PI hunt and plan to eradicate the disease are required.” |