

Good progress towards BVD eradication

The latest National BVD Survey results make for positive reading. Boehringer Ingelheim Animal Health's Matt Yarnall shares the highlights from the 2020 report.

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Engaging with an eradication scheme, a better understanding of BVD, implementation of biosecurity measures and the importance of removing PIs from the herd are key, according to the latest BVD survey.

This fifth national survey was carried out by Boehringer in collaboration with the BVD eradication programmes in England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, as well as the producers' unions in those countries.

A total of 1,013 producers were surveyed in January 2020, and good representation from all countries (see Figure 1), revealed an increase in producer awareness of the impact of BVD and the importance of control – both on individual units and across the wider industry.

Producer motivation

“The differences in the approach to BVD were marked this year, with a far greater proportion of Welsh producers tackling BVD. Better herd performance in herds without BVD has driven this improvement along with the BVD eradication programme, Gwaredu BVD,” says Mr Yarnall. Producers in England are tackling BVD as part of a CHecs scheme or to meet assurance schemes such as

Red Tractor (see Figure 2). “The non-compulsory eradication campaigns in England and Wales have certainly stepped up a gear. And there's also a push from producers for these schemes to become compulsory, as it already is in Scotland,” he adds. Whatever the motivation, uptake and engagement, and an understanding of the disease and the importance of control, have increased across the board.

And, with producers in England able to take advantage of free BVD testing and veterinary support as part of the ‘Stamp It Out’ initiative, it's no surprise that there has been a significant increase in the number of producers signing up to the BVDFree scheme. The survey shows that 62% are now engaged on a scheme, up from 51% 12 months ago.

Compulsory schemes

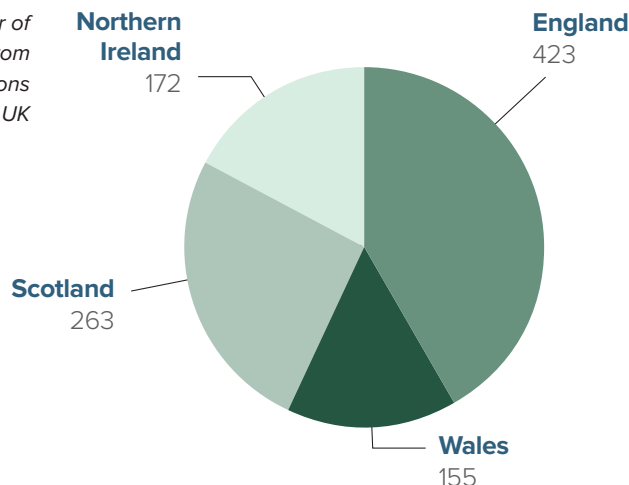
He adds that what's also particularly encouraging is that 91% of producers in England want BVD eradication to be made compulsory, while only 11 out of the 423 (2.6%) English respondents would not join the BVDFree England programme. “Producers clearly value the progress that they've made by being part of the scheme and want to protect that. They recognise that BVD is still a threat to their herd if other producers – particularly neighbouring herds – are not taking steps to control and eradicate the disease.

“They want to protect those gains and know that their investment is safe. I'm sure that Scotland and Ireland would be keen to support the introduction of compulsory schemes across the rest of the UK as such a move would also protect their progress in eradicating BVD,” says Mr Yarnall.

“Agriculture is a devolved issue, but with changes to the Agriculture Bill at the moment talking about farmers being supported for ‘public goods’, BVD control fits that definition so progress could be made.”

This desire for a compulsory approach across the UK is also reflected in an increased awareness of the importance of biosecurity – and what that actually looks like.

Figure 1: Number of respondents from different regions of the UK



The confusion about what constitutes a truly closed herd is lifting.

“In Northern Ireland, for example, there was a decrease in the number of herds stating they were closed, down from 60% to 50%.

“That may reflect an improvement of awareness of what a closed herd means, and that a herd buying in bulls can’t be classed as ‘closed’. But there are still 16% of herds saying they’re closed but buy in bulls,” says Mr Yarnall.

PI removal

The PI message – to remove them from the herd immediately once they’re identified – is also getting through, albeit slowly.

This has been highlighted in past surveys as a particular problem when it comes to effective BVD control. It’s an area that’s crucial to success, yet many producers, for a myriad of reasons, may still hang on to PIs.

“In Wales, for example, 32% of producers surveyed in the 2020 report say that they would not cull identified PIs immediately. This is an improvement on the 2019 figure of 42%, but there’s still a way to go.

“Not culling PIs maintains a potent source of infection for other animals in the herd and passing it on to other producers if calves are sold from the herd,” stresses Mr Yarnall.

Other countries should look to Northern Ireland to see the impact that retaining PIs can have on the herd.

“The 2020 survey reveals that 20 producers retained a PI – that’s 16% of all those that identified one. And it is interesting to note that this was the same proportion of producers that retained a PI in 2019.

“Clearly attitudes haven’t changed much but, in both years of asking what the outcome of retaining a PI was, the majority (77% in 2019 and 65% in 2020) of those animals had either died, been put down before reaching a productive size or had to be treated for other conditions.

“When asked, 90% or more of these producers admitted they wouldn’t knowingly retain a PI animal

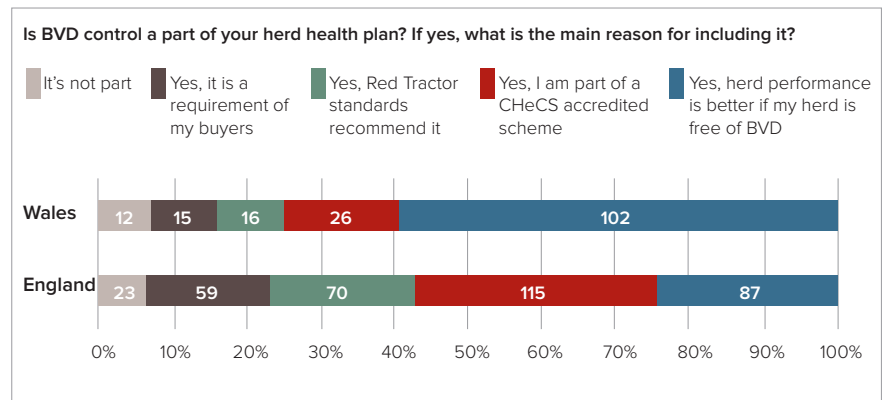


Figure 2: National BVD survey results

again. By far the main reason that producers held onto PIs was because the animals looked healthy. Other reasons were that they doubted the result, they had successfully reared PIs to slaughter in the past or another producer advised them to.

“The overall feedback is that retaining PIs for those that have experienced it was not of benefit,” says Mr Yarnall. “This is information that other producers who are hesitating when it comes to PI disposal should consider carefully.”

Less tolerant

He adds that producers in Northern Ireland are not able to send PIs to slaughter, as abattoirs are no longer accepting them. “This limits producers’ options and when they were asked what would encourage the disposal of PIs, the majority (65%) favoured herd restrictions, while only 52% favoured PI removal support payments, down from 59% in 2019. So perhaps producers are becoming less tolerant of those who hold on to PIs?”

He says that has to be a positive thing. “PIs should not be tolerated – in your herd or anyone else’s. They’re a reservoir of infection and a serious threat to health herd. The animal may look well, it may be your best cow or heifer, but keeping her is a risk that can’t be taken.”

