

BVD requirements for future cattle exports

Additional BVD control measures are likely to be required shortly for farmers exporting breeding cattle or cattle to be finished to the ROI. These measures have been introduced in EU legislation to promote the competitiveness and trading of animals by preventing and eradicating specific animal diseases, including BVD.

The changes will be implemented because of the remarkable progress that has been made in the ROI's BVD Programme and the fact that DAFM intends to apply for official recognition of the Programme in 2022. Levels of BVD have fallen dramatically in the ROI, thanks to a suite of measures that have been introduced over the past few years, notably financial supports, herd restrictions, veterinary herd investigations and follow up testing. In contrast, overall progress in reducing BVD in NI in the past year has levelled off, with a small increase in numbers of initial positive results detected since February 2021.

Once the ROI Programme is approved, cattle from NI may need to have additional blood testing carried out within particular time frames or they may need to spend 21 days in approved quarantine facilities, depending on whether the exporting herd is given a BVD-free herd status. To attain BVD-free herd status, one option under the EU Regulation is that the establishment must not have had a confirmed case of BVD in the previous 18 months and that all cattle must have a direct or indirect negative status as a result of virus antigen testing.

If BVD-free herd status is recognised in exporting herds, then the pre-export requirements are likely to be less significant and to incur lower costs. Almost 75% of all NI herds meet criteria previously set for BVD Low Risk herds. There is a growing need for herd level BVD statuses to be introduced, so that herd owners can benefit, so that the current programme can be enhanced and to allow official EU recognition of the Programme to be applied for at the appropriate time. Industry, through the BVD Implementation Group, continues to make requests to DAERA for a range of measures to be provided under current and new legislative provisions.

BVD vaccinated animals will still be permitted to move until BVD Free Status is achieved (possibly in 2023) by the ROI. However, once country-level freedom is achieved, BVD vaccinated animals will no longer be eligible for export. Other restrictions on vaccination protocols may be introduced. It is important to be aware that vaccination is a vital part of disease control at present in many herds. BVD vaccination can prevent transplacental infection of the foetus with the BVD virus and is an effective method of preventing spillover of the virus into subsequent crops of calves.

BVD vaccination should not be stopped without consulting with the farm's veterinary practitioner, to talk through any risks to the herd that may still be present, such as the risk that the virus is circulating in the herd and the chance that the BVD virus could be introduced on to the farm.