

Additional measures needed as BVD levels continue to rise

Animal level incidence of BVD has increased for the eighth month in a row and over half of all living BVD Positive cattle are currently being retained for more than four weeks, according to BVD statistical reports obtained this month. Prompt identification and removal of BVD Persistently Infected (PI) cattle are the keys to BVD control, so the fact that these cattle with suspected infection are not being dealt with quickly is a hindrance to the progress being made towards eradication. It is clear that additional measures are needed so that the upward trajectory of animal level incidence is permanently reversed.

Industry continues to make representations to DAERA regarding further work that is essential if we are to achieve the eradication of BVD. The ROI is progressing to the point when the requirement to compulsorily test calves' ear tissue samples will be removed for the majority of their herds. There is a growing need for basic information on herd level BVD statuses to be introduced in NI as an enhancement to the Programme and to allow potential costs to cattle farmers who wish to sell breeding stock to the ROI and other EU Member States to be minimised.

The BVD Implementation Group has encouraged and supported the measures being taken by industry to try to accelerate the culling of PIs, namely, prompt communication of relevant information to affected farmers, with opportunity for discussion and investigation of outbreaks, local veterinary involvement in breakdown situations, the voluntary abattoir ban and the introduction of retention of a Positive as a non-conformance in the Farm Quality Assurance Scheme.

The question persists as to why some farmers retain BVD Positives and have a reluctance to act on BVD results. Effective 'distancing' of known BVD Positive cattle as soon as they are identified, until they either receive a BVD Negative result on a retest or are culled, is necessary in order to reduce the risk of spread of the virus, particularly to in-calf stock. Immediate isolation can prevent this contagious organism from circulating in the herd and thus shorten the length of time for which the BVD virus is present on the farm.

Note for editors:

1. AHWNI is responsible for the delivery of the Northern Ireland Bovine Viral Diarrhoea Eradication Scheme. For more information on the operation of the Scheme, please contact AHWNI (email info@animalhealthni.com, tel. 028 7963 9333) or visit the AHWNI website www.animalhealthni.com.