

## Falling BVD levels and the ongoing need to protect at-risk herds



Latest figures from the BVD Programme show that for the first time in the life of the NI BVD Programme, for 3 consecutive months fewer than 40 herds have been retaining BVD Positives for more than 5 weeks. Snapshot figures from the start of May indicated that there were 181 living BVD Positives in 113 affected herds. The rolling herd level prevalence has fallen to 4.57%, the lowest level seen this year, with a greater improvement being seen in beef herds compared to dairy herds.

As the programme progresses and infection levels decrease, there is also a decrease in the levels of natural immunity to BVD in herds. This means that the likelihood of pregnant cattle being exposed to virus has decreased but the susceptibility to infection may have increased because there is less natural exposure to the BVD virus. This reduction in immunity may leave herds more exposed to large outbreaks should a PI animal be introduced.

Larger herds have generally a greater likelihood of infection getting in. The key risk factors that increase the probability of BVD entering a herd are:

- History of BVD in the herd
- Purchase of cattle
- Purchase of 'Trojan' cattle (in-calf animals carrying a PI calf)
- Increased concentration of BVD-Positive animals in the vicinity of the herd.

Other risks include direct contact with other animals (eg at boundaries, shows and sales) and indirect contact (eg contaminated environments, equipment or clothing or hands of farmers, employees or visitors). Any herd which has been or is exposed to some or all of these risks in the absence of appropriate control measures has an increased probability of BVD getting into their herd.

BVD vaccination induces a protective immunity in breeding animals to help avoid a range of negative outcomes of infection including failure to conceive, abortion, birth defects and most importantly the creation of calves that are persistently infected with BVD virus. The decision whether to vaccinate or not depends on the risk profile of the herd. Factors to consider in whether to vaccinate will include: animal movements into a herd, the level of contact with neighbouring herds, whether there have been outbreaks in a neighbouring or associated herd; a greater than normal throughput of people, such as on demonstration farms; and in herds of high genetic merit females where progeny is of a higher value.

Decisions on the use of BVD vaccine, including when to stop a vaccination programme, are herd-specific and should be taken by each farmer in discussion with their own veterinary practitioner. Stopping a BVD vaccination programme prematurely, where biosecurity risks still exist, could be a very expensive mistake. Cost savings need to be balanced with the risk of BVD recurring. Animal health plans should be discussed with the farm's vet and a full BVD investigation carried out if there has been previous infection in the herd.

### 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](mailto:info@animalhealthni.com), tel. 028 7963 9333) or visit the AHWNI website [www.animalhealthni.com](http://www.animalhealthni.com).
2. An updated Bulletin on BVD vaccination has recently been published by AHWNI, using material produced by the all-island Technical Working Group on BVD which is facilitated by Animal Health Ireland.