

BVD Positive cattle numbers fall below 500

The number of BVD Positive cattle alive on NI farms has fallen to below 500 for the first time in the BVD eradication programme's history. January figures also indicate that herd owners are making increased efforts to resolve the BVD status of restricted dams of BVD Positive calves, either through sampling of these dams by private vets or by culling, so that fewer than 100 animals in this category are currently alive.

The number of retained BVD Positive cattle has also fallen to 380 in 264 herds, according to the latest programme statistics. Despite the progress being made, additional measures are necessary to accelerate the disposal of BVD infected animals, action which is key to eradication of the BVD virus. Animals that are Persistently Infected (PI) with BVD are likely to deteriorate with time; the majority do not survive to reach production potential.

Analysis of the ROI programme has shown that retaining BVD positive calves doubles the risk of having more PIs during the following year and increases the risk of spread to neighbouring herds. As recently as October 2019, over 25% of calves that were identified as being BVD positive were being held on NI farms for over 5 weeks, that is, beyond a reasonable time to allow for retesting or disposal of the affected animals.

When a positive result is returned after testing, the calf concerned should be isolated immediately and either humanely destroyed or retested. If a retest is going to be carried out, this should be arranged with a private vet so that sampling is carried out once three weeks from the date of ear tag sampling has elapsed.

Industry is keen to reach the goal of BVD eradication as quickly as possible through a focussed Programme and, for that reason, requested in the past that DAERA introduce measures that have been shown in other programmes to improve the speed of removal of positive animals. These include the imposition of movement restrictions on herds retaining PIs, the issue of neighbour biosecurity notifications and the provision of targeted veterinary advice. Delivery of these measures is still under development.

In the coming months, action will be taken through the NI Farm Quality Assurance Scheme (FQAS) so that retention of a BVD Positive animal will result in suspension of a farm's FQAS status until the situation is rectified. This action is expected to have a significant effect in reducing PI retention levels.

So, while farmer compliance with the BVD scheme has been excellent overall, there is still a need to address the issue of PI retention by a small but consequential number of individuals, through a range of additional controls and regulations.