

Number of BVD-Positive retaining herds falls below 200 for the first time

BVD Programme figures for March 2020 show that the number of herds retaining BVD Positive cattle for more than 5 weeks has fallen to 196, the lowest level in the Scheme's history. Retained BVD Positive cattle numbers have halved in the past 15 months, thanks to decisions being made by individual farmers and efforts being made by veterinary surgeons and industry bodies to remind farmers of the risks that these animals present and to encourage their removal.

While the progress made is welcome, it must be noted that the biggest impediment to a faster drop in disease levels is the fact that PIs are still being retained. Each retained animal is a significant risk. This is because BVD is a highly infectious viral disease: Persistently Infected (PI) cattle shed significant amounts of virus and present a major threat to other cattle on their holding as well as to cattle on neighbouring farms. Figures for calves born during December 2019 show that fewer than 70% of those with a BVD Positive status were removed within 5 weeks of getting the initial BVD result.

Owners of BVD infected cattle need to show responsibility in isolating BVD Positive or Inconclusive cattle, isolation being a legal requirement, pending a retest or slaughter. This will minimise the potential of these animals to transmit the infection to other calves which would then become more susceptible to pneumonias and scours, or to in-calf cows and heifers which would then be at risk of infertility, abortion, stillbirth or the production of more PI calves in the next calving season.

When PI calves are detected in a herd, retesting of a blood sample may be carried out for confirmation: of resample tests carried out in the last 12 months, 83% have returned a further positive result. Additional testing is required to identify any other PI cattle that may be present in the herd. Farmers with cattle of BVD Unknown (BVDU) status should test them as soon as possible using a supplementary tag or blood sample taken by their veterinary surgeon.

While this time of year is particularly busy on many farms, herd owners are encouraged to tag calves promptly after birth (ideally as soon as the calf is dry). If ear tissue samples are being stored in a fridge before being dispatched to a laboratory, they should be stored for no longer than seven days. Timely testing is essential as the prompt identification and removal of PI cattle is the key to disease control.

There are multiple benefits to be gained by the eradication of BVD, such as lower production costs and a decreased need for the use of anti-microbials. Industry's goal is to achieve eradication as soon as possible.