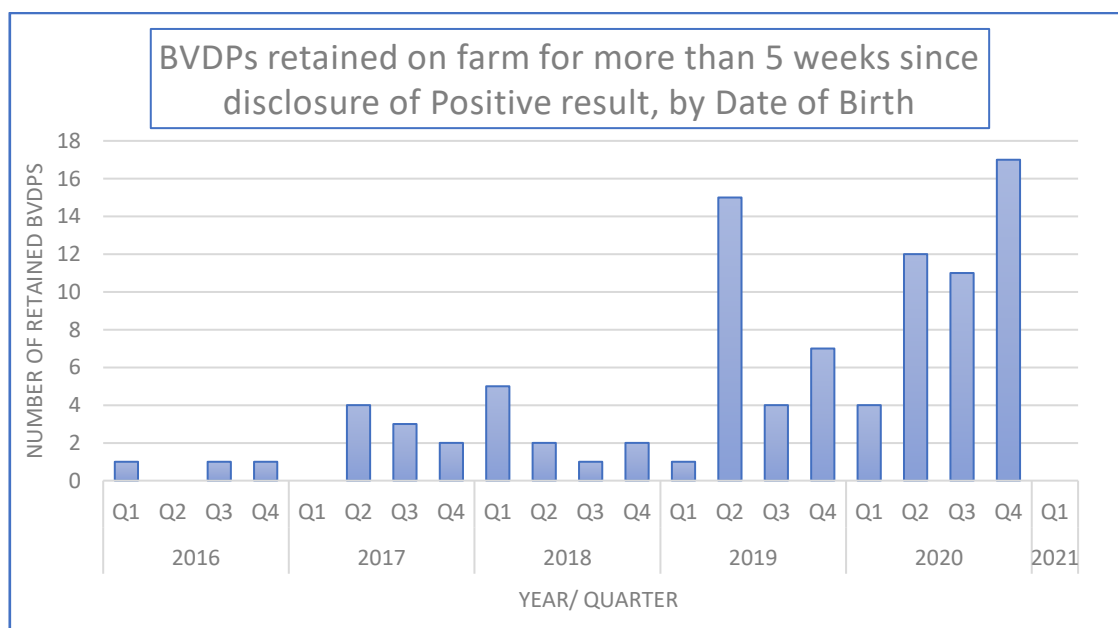


Half of current BVD herds are retaining BVD Positives

Latest figures from the BVD Programme show that of the 125 herds that contained BVD Positive cattle at the start of March 2021, 64 of these herds had retained BVD Positive cattle for over 5 weeks. Retention of BVD Positive cattle has been an ongoing issue for the BVD Programme and there have been regular calls from stakeholders over the past four years for tighter measures to be introduced to discourage this practice. While there has been a substantial reduction in BVD incidence, the retention of BVD positives remains the largest impediment to eradicating this infection.

The BVD National Survey 2021 carried out by Boehringer-Ingelheim recently generated some interesting responses from NI farmers: the most popular measure to encourage the disposal of Persistently Infected (PI) animals was the use of herd restrictions on retaining herds, which was almost twice as popular as notification to neighbouring herds and over three times more popular than isolation checks.

The fact that over half of current herds are retaining BVD Positives is a concern. There were 93 retained animals at the start of March and the average length of time for which these cattle have been retained on farm is 405 days. The presence of older BVD Positive cattle in the NI herd is skewing the average retention time data. The graph below illustrates the age range of living BVD Positives at 1st March 2021:



In addition to more recently born retained calves, it is disappointing to note the presence of older animals either that have not been retested or that are surviving PI animals which will be excreting enormous amounts of BVD virus constantly. Every day that a BVD Positive animal is on a farm, it presents a risk to other cattle, whether in its own herd or in neighbouring herds. Circulating virus can cause damaging transient infections, but of greater significance is the fact that if the virus infects susceptible early in-calf cows or heifers, a further wave of BVD PI calves will be born during the next calving season.

In order for BVD to be stamped out, herd owners are encouraged to isolate BVD Positive cattle in housing and to retest or cull them at the earliest opportunity. Industry's aim is to eradicate this costly disease from NI to reduce animal health and welfare problems including infertility, abortions, calf pneumonia and scours, and to improve farm profitability.