

## **Implications of new EU Animal Health Law for NI BVD Programme**

The NI BVD Programme will be impacted by the new EU Animal Health Law, which regulates transmissible animal diseases and is applicable from 21 April 2021. For the first time, BVD control measures are described in EU legislation: this extensive regulation is designed to promote the competitiveness and trading of animals and animal products by preventing and eradicating specific animal diseases.

EU Member States may seek approval of their disease control Programmes and ultimately apply for official freedom from particular diseases, the granting of which will affect cattle trading requirements with countries lacking the relevant freedoms. As regulations within NI are expected to align with EU requirements, and as the NI BVD Programme moves further along the road to eradication, changes are necessary. These changes will in time allow NI to apply for recognition of its Programme and help avoid potential live trade barriers to countries and regions within the EU that are recognised as free of BVD. It is vital that the NI cattle industry achieves BVD eradication and is recognised as having high and achievable animal health ambitions.

For a herd to be recognised as being free from BVD, all cattle must have been virus antigen tested with negative results and there must not have been any cases of BVD confirmed in bovine animals kept in the establishment during the previous 18 months. To put these requirements in context, currently 15,432 NI cattle herds (out of 21,877 in the NI BVD Programme, that is over 70% of herds) have had all cattle tested with negative results. At present, 14,981 herds meet both of these requirements (that is, 68.4% of all NI cattle herds in the Programme).

To have NI recognised as being BVD-free under the new Law, at least 99.8% of the establishments representing at least 99.9% of the bovine population must be free from BVD. At present this equates to all but approximately 43 herds (and approximately 1,600 bovine animals) being free from BVD. By way of comparison, on 4<sup>th</sup> January 2021, there were 127 herds affected. In addition, there must have been no confirmed cases of BVD in the herd during the previous 18 months: in the past 18 months in NI, there have been over 1,100 confirmed cases of BVD.

It has been the aim of the BVD Implementation Group that every bovine animal in NI, including animals born before the start of the compulsory Programme, should have a direct Negative (BVDN) or indirect Negative (INDINEG) status. Farmers have been encouraged to check the BVD profile of their herd, to resolve untested cattle and to ensure that no reservoir of the virus remains on their farm.

In anticipation of the new EU Animal Health Law and recognising the changes in requirements needed, industry have made requests to DAERA for a range of measures to be provided under new legislative provisions. There is a growing need for herd level BVD statuses to be introduced, so that the current programme can be enhanced and to allow official EU recognition of the industry-led Programme to be applied for at the appropriate time.

Industry continues to make representations to DAERA regarding essential further work to achieve the eradication of BVD as soon as possible, particularly the implementation of measures to strongly discourage PI retention.