

Progress as the number of older cattle with no BVD status reduces

The number of older cattle in NI that do not have a BVD status has fallen to below 6,000, down from just under 12,000 one year ago and 35,000 two years ago. This represents significant progress in the establishment of BVD statuses in cattle that were born before 1st March 2016, the starting date of the compulsory BVD Programme. In working to eradicate BVD, the aim of industry is that every bovine animal should have a direct Negative or indirect Negative (as a result of having a BVD Negative calf) status.

Farmers have been taking steps to complete the BVD profile of their herds and at the start of May, over 15,500 herds had a BVD status for every bovine animal in their herd, representing 70% of NI herds. The primary reason for testing cattle for BVD is to identify those that are positive or inconclusive, so that action can be taken to eliminate any reservoir of this damaging virus, thus reducing the risks presented to the herd.

Of the cattle born in NI after the start of the compulsory programme, just under 15,000 are restricted from moving to markets or other farms due to a 'BVD Unknown' status and herd owners are encouraged to test these cattle as soon as possible, to find out their BVD status. These cattle cannot be accepted at a market and should not be sold directly to other farms as they are restricted on APHIS until a negative test result has been returned from an approved laboratory. Herd owners can check the BVD profile of their herd on their APHIS herd list, as BVD statuses are displayed against individual animals; testing should be carried out using a supplementary tag or a blood sample taken by a private vet.

As the ROI BVD Programme is similar to the NI Programme, AHWNI can carry out checks on cattle imported from the ROI that have a BVD Unknown (BVDU) status, using ROI BVD status data from ICBF (where an approved laboratory has been used), to find out whether a negative BVD status can be uploaded to APHIS for these animals without the need for further testing.

To comply with the NI BVD Programme, cattle born in England, Scotland or Wales that are being imported to NI must be tested for virus antigen by an approved laboratory, either before arrival in NI or within 20 days of arrival. Herd owners must arrange and pay for the testing, which is also required to be carried out before the cattle are moved from the destination herd in NI. As DAERA rules mean that all cattle moving from GB to NI for Breeding and Production purposes need to be re-tagged by the receiving NI keeper, it is recommended that BVD sample tags are used for re-tagging GB imported animals in cases where the animal does not have a valid BVD test result for the NI Programme.

Industry continues to work towards the eradication of the BVD virus, which has a major economic impact in cattle herds, so that the benefits of lower production costs and a decreased need for antibiotics can be realised.