

## Ongoing damage caused by retaining BVD Positives

**Analysis of recent BVD Programme figures indicates that, while the herd prevalence of BVD is decreasing, the retention of BVD Positive cattle continues to be a major obstacle to progress of the eradication scheme. At the start of November 2019, there were 427 BVD positive animals that had been retained on-farm for more than five weeks since receiving a positive result, in 283 herds. A small but significant number of farmers have not followed up on BVD positive results either by retesting the animals or by culling, resulting in ongoing damage that may not become apparent until the next calving season.**

The November figures show that there has been a net decrease of 9% overall in the number of herds with retained BVD Positive animals in the last month. However, of the 283 retaining herds in NI, 177 herds have been knowingly retaining BVD positive cattle for more than 6 months and of these 177 herds, one third are in the Armagh and Newry DVO areas.

A number of veterinary practices have recently increased their efforts in discussing retention issues with their clients, in an effort to persuade these herd owners to resolve the status of their PI cattle. An interesting snapshot of herd owner views was provided through an annual survey undertaken by a veterinary pharmaceutical company earlier this year: of the 200 NI farmers who responded to the Boehringer-Ingelheim BVD survey 2019, 26 said that they had kept a Persistently Infected (PI) animal. Among these producers, 18 had animals that died or were put down before reaching a productive stage, illustrating the devastating effects that the BVD virus can have.

When asked, “If you ever knowingly retained a PI animal would you do the same again?”, 93% farmers indicated that they would not retain a PI animal again. All PIs shed enormous amounts of virus and pose a very significant risk to other cattle on the holding as well as to cattle on neighbouring premises, so their identification and prompt removal is the key to disease control.

Additional measures are now necessary to accelerate the disposal of BVD infected animals. There are major benefits to be gained by the eradication of BVD, such as lower production costs, a decreased need for and use of anti-microbials, reduced animal related greenhouse gas emissions and improved animal welfare. The BVD Programme’s aim is that every eligible animal in the NI cattle herd should have a direct Negative (BVDN) or indirect Negative (INDINEG) status, meaning that the BVD virus will have been eliminated from the NI cattle population.