CATTLE HEALTH

Controlling BVD

A NUMBER of European countries have national programmes to eradicate bovine viral diarrhea (BVD); some have already succeeded. Recently, both Scotland and Ireland have embarked on national programmes with somewhat different structures but with the same overall objective. The Animal Health and Welfare Strategy Steering Group in Wales has identified BVD as one of its endemic animal disease priorities and is keen to see an initiative developed to tackle BVD in Wales while ensuring that efforts are joined up across the UK.

More recently, it has been proposed that a possible English BVD national programme should be examined (VR, January 12, 2013, vol 172, p 53). Although some of us have been talking about this for a number of years, the present proposal is distinguished by its strong industrial support from levy bodies and farming organisations. We have a year (to April 2014) in which to gather sufficient evidence and support to assess whether England and Wales are in a position, and prepared, to undertake such a task. Clearly there will be some substantial difficulties to consider, not least the present financial position of farmers and the long shadow of bovine TB.

The newly formed BVD Stakeholders Group (under the aegis of the England Cattle Health and Welfare Group) will examine the overall issues involved with veterinarian/farmer training programmes and also with national control. To guide the stakeholder group, a scientific and technical subgroup (STG) has been formed. The STG will look at a number of issues: the suitability and availability of BVD tests, the best way that such tests can be used and the overall structure that best suits a national programme for BVD control and eradication.

As chairman of this STG, I am writing to colleagues in cattle practice to ask them to contact me with details of any BVD control scheme that they are undertaking with their clients. Over the years, both Richard Booth and I at the Royal Veterinary College (RVC) have spoken to many of you and to your practices in England but I would urge all practices to make contact again soon, hopefully by May 6 this year. This will allow us to obtain up-to-date information and, thereby, some national understanding of what is already underway. I am aware of some excellent schemes and, by collating such information, we may find we are doing better nationally than we know! The recent letter by Reynolds and Mouncey (VR, February 2, 2013, vol 172, p 156) is encouraging.

A questionnaire outlining the information that would be most useful for this analysis is available at www.rvc.ac.uk/bvd/national-eradication.cfm or can be obtained by contacting Lisa Harber at the RVC, telephone 01707 666323. Our preference would be for the questionnaire to be downloaded from the website, completed electronically and returned by e-mail to: lharber@rvc.ac.uk.

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CATTLE WELFARE

Legal position on ‘once a day’ feeding of artificial milk to calves

FOLLOWING a number of inquiries regarding our previous letter on ‘once a day’ feeding of liquid feed to calves (VR, February 2, 2013, vol 172, p 135), we thought it would be helpful to provide further clarification on the legal position and what this means in practice.

Our previous letter was triggered by a number of calves recently diagnosed at the AHVLA with abomasal disorders (abomasitis and/ or bloat), which could be associated with being fed artificial milk once a day with no other supplementary feeds. At present there are several artificial milk powders for sale in the UK that are marketed as being suitable for ‘once a day’ feeding of calves from a few days of age (essentially after sufficient colostrum has been taken in the first day).

The law states that all calves must be fed at least twice a day – Schedule 6, paragraph 12 (1) to The Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 (WoFAR) (Anon 2007), which implements the EU calves Directive 2000/119/EC (EC 2000). It is also mandatory to inspect housed calves at least twice daily (Schedule 6, paragraph 2 to WoFAR). Monitoring food consumption is a useful management tool as slow or reduced feed intake is often an early sign of disease.

In addition, the statutory Code of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock: Cattle (Defra 2011) recommends that all calves should receive liquid food.

Until the end of June the laboratory fees for ACTH tests are FREE. Vouchers can be downloaded at www.talkaboutlaminitis.co.uk. So spring into action now and test every case of laminitis for PPID.

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