

dangle a carrot when it comes to tackling BVD head on. "We know more about BVD now and we have more tests to use in an eradication plan so why wait? Monitor your herd. If the virus is identified then act quickly and most of all, employ a comprehensive plan and don't expect that just by vaccinating the job will be done."

Use two milk tests

The first step in any eradication programme is to establish herd status and this is the step that Scottish producers – beef and dairy – have been taking as part of a compulsory scheme for the past 12 months. Bulk milk samples from the dairy herd can be used here to both test for BVD antibodies and detect any BVD virus.

Mr Howie has worked with NML in the development of its BVD milk testing services and with the recently introduced qPCR test that uses a bulk milk sample to detect the BVD virus. "Antibody testing on a routine basis is useful for many herds to show if the herd has been exposed to virus, but we know that vaccine response can make interpretation difficult," says Mr Howie. "So by bringing in a complimentary service that can identify and quantify the actual virus, we have a lot more information about the milking herd's BVD status".

NML's BVD qPCR and antibody tests are offered on both an ad hoc and a quarterly basis. Milk samples already held by NML for payment purposes are used for the test so there is no need for additional sampling.

"This new qPCR service works well

in partnership with routine antibody testing of the bulk tank as a first step for routine surveillance of BVD," says Mr Howie. "If you consider the levels of exposure in parallel with the levels of virus in the bulk tank, it provides useful information about the timing of an outbreak and could provide an early warning system."

Vaccination not enough

These tests can then be used as part of routine surveillance, which will enable producers and vets to identify then track the disease. Although the herd may be vaccinated it doesn't eliminate the risk of a naive animal that doesn't produce enough antibodies – she is at risk of infection and may produce a PI calf that is then a risk to the whole herd. Routine milk tests will pick up the virus.

NML also offers blood antibody testing services for groups of between five and 10 pre-vaccinated youngstock, aged between six and 18 months of age in each management group, to identify if animals have been exposed to virus.

The use of Tag and Test, where a tissue sample from young calves is tested for the BVD virus or antigen, is also a useful

part of the surveillance package and ideal for beef calves too.

"We have worked hard to build a system that provides enough information to give a confident status report for every herd," adds Mr Howie. "Herds vary, but if we provide a logical structure and a cost effective method of testing, vets can establish which herds to protect or which to search for PI animals. We must be careful not to over interpret negative results and ensure that our judgements are based on sufficient information. NML can offer all of the tools to eliminate doubt."

In support of DairyCo and EBLEX plans for a national scheme, NML has integrated its milk test services into recommended surveillance schemes to help vets with establishing a 'status' for a farm.

"The tools are available to put BVD to bed as an active disease on most British farms," adds Mr Howie. "Yet reports from diagnostic labs and surveys that assess management priorities show that BVD is still a major concern. National initiatives will be an important part of eradication, but each manager can take key steps to protect their own assets." |

Key points to BVD eradication

- Vaccination alone is not enough
- Surveillance is important even if the virus is absent
- Establishing and monitoring BVD status in all herds is vital
- Any PI animals must be identified quickly and removed
- Don't forget to test the bull.

