

## LIVESTOCK

## Survey shows need for more advice on BVD

## Inconsistent approach to disease

RESULTS from a 'farming against BVD' survey have given an insight into dairy and beef farmers' current practices, attitudes and understanding of bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD).

The survey, carried out by Novartis Animal Health in conjunction with the Royal Veterinary College and vets McMurtry and Harding, questioned 301 dairy and beef farmers from every region of England and Wales, with the results representing more than 70,000 head of cattle.

The findings showed an inconsistent approach to the disease and demonstrated the need for more targeted advice to help farmers tackle this complicated disease.

James Russell, from McMurtry and Harding, says: "BVD is a serious, industry wide problem and one that farmers are clearly aware of, with more than 70 per cent of respondents having a herd health plan which incorporated BVD."

"However the survey also showed much work needs to be done in providing practical advice about how farmers tackle the virus in their herds."

"What is deeply concerning is 49 per cent of farmers questioned had not tested their herd for BVD in the last 12 months and of those who did, 83 per cent did not go on



The survey showed 49 per cent of farmers questioned had not tested their herd for BVD in the last 12 months and of those who did, 83 per cent did not go on to test their youngstock.

to test their youngstock. So while farmers may be aware of BVD, there appears, on this evidence, to be a disconnect between awareness and practical activity in the detection and then eradication of infection from their herd."

## Persistently infected

One of the most significant findings of the report was the attitude of farmers towards testing and subsequent failure to identify persistently infected (PI) livestock within their herd.

Professor Joe Brownlie from

the Royal Veterinary College and current chairman of the BVD scientific and technical working group, said it was a worry 39 per cent of farmers who found BVD present in their herd did not then go on to test for PI's.

"Of the 61 per cent of farmers who did follow up tests for PI's

once BVD had been detected in their herd, one-third found one or more PI's within the stock holding."

"However, one-third of farmers who identified having active BVD infection in their herd then failed to go on and carry out individual animal testing; of those who did, nearly half discovered one or more



James Russell



Prof Joe Brownlie

## Other survey findings

■ 50 per cent of farmers surveyed were unsure as to what types of tests need to be carried out to detect the infection in their livestock

■ 32 per cent of respondents were unaware correct vaccination of livestock against BVD can protect both the cow and unborn calf

individual PI's within their herd.

"It just shows the disease can be hidden and farmers could be in the dangerous position of potentially missing PI animals which are in their herd. PI's can continue to spread the BVD virus among other cattle and pass on their PI status to any calves they produce. It is hugely important to be thorough and consistent in your testing as part of an agreed herd health plan"

The survey also indicated action needed to be taken to educate farmers about what to do once BVD and, most significantly, PI's are discovered among a herd.

"There is much evidence from this survey to encourage the in-

dustry in how it is tackling this disease," says Prof Brownlie.

## Non-infective

"However there is still a great need for clear direction. The survey indicated 20 per cent of farmers wrongly believe PI animals will eventually become non-infective and 25 per cent believe calves born off PI cows will not always have PI calves themselves."

"All of these perceptions are incorrect and can lead to reservoirs of the disease being allowed to remain not only within individual herds, but geographical regions as well; seriously hindering the eradication of the virus in England and Wales."

## What next?

THE side effects of BVD, which can include poor health, reduced milk yield, and loss of reproductive efficiency appear to be overlooked according to Caroline Dawson (pictured), Novartis professional services veterinary surgeon.

"Perhaps by aiding understanding of the financial cost of the virus, we can encourage farmers to take more proactive steps to combat BVD."

"As such, I am pleased to announce the 'farming against BVD' panel has initiated a



follow on project to carry out detailed research with regards to the financial impact of BVD on farms and is due to report findings in the new year."

## Sheep stockjudging winner

THE winner of the *Farmers Guardian*/NSA/Texel Society sheep stockjudging competition is Robert Gowling, Little Oxendon Farm, Market Harborough, Leicestershire.

Mr Gowling correctly placed the animals in the same order as our judge, renowned Texel breeder Brian MacTaggart of Douganhill Texels, Dumfries and Galloway, who chose as his running order B.A.X.Y, offering the following explanation for his decision:

"B - Very flashy, plenty of breed character. Good end and an all-round sound sheep.

"A - Another excellent gimmer, although lacks some character in the head compared

to B. Excellent carcass and end.

"X - Good carcass and good frame, lacks breed character.

"Y - Good character, although back and legs disappoint."

Mr Gowling wins £250, plus a body warmer and beanie hat.

Five runners-up will each receive a body warmer and beanie hat. They are: Mick Handley, Wooperon, Alnwick; Donald Hutchinson, Broughton-in-Furness, Cumbria; Stuart Lane, New Hall, Kerry; Matthew Lee, Bolton, Lancashire; Pauline Robb, Chelmsford, Essex.

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