



A campaign to promote the control and prevention of BVD in cattle

Critical indicators of BVD

Although one of the most common diseases of dairy and beef cattle throughout Europe, many herds put up with the unseen losses BVD (bovine viral diarrhoea) causes which range from immunosuppression to poor fertility, problems with late abortions and stillborn calves through to weak and sickly calves.

The impact of BVD on calf health is of particular interest to vet Richard Knight from Westmorland Vet Group, Kendal.

Viable calf

He says: "As a practice, we see the full mix of dairy and suckler herds ranging from high input high output to more extensive," Mr Knight explains.

"But, at the heart of all systems is the production of a successful, live and viable calf. Without that, whatever the system, herd performance will always be compromised."

Record keeping will allow managers to determine whether or not the rate of live births is on target. And, as Mr Knight explains, there are key signs to look out for once a calf is born which may indicate BVD is a problem in a herd.

"Many of us will have seen a poor doer calf, maybe it is scouring, perhaps pneumonia has taken hold or sometimes it may appear to have poor sight and limb problems," he says. "These are all critical indicators to look out for."

Immune response

Respiratory problems are extremely common in BVD-affected herds. "The virus compromises the calf's immune response to the bugs which can cause pneumonia, meaning it is more likely to take hold. If your medicine records show the widespread use of antibiotics to manage calf pneumonia, it may be worth investigating the cause in more detail with your vet."

Some quick at-a-glance



Daniel Dobson says healthy calves keep the farm business viable.

checks on either live calves or those aborted late in pregnancy can also indicate a BVD problem:

- Legs which have difficulty straightening.
- Misshapen neck or head.
- Calves off their back legs due to spinal chord malformations.
- The head appearing to tip back.
- Overly small.
- Skin covered in lesions which

look like cuts or grazes.

Live calves may also show:

- Cataracts.
- Blindness in one or both eyes.
- Small eyes.

"Any of the signs listed above are red flag warning signs BVD could be a problem; the best advice is to get your vet involved to undertake some diagnostic work and help formulate a plan," Mr Knight says.

Case study: Daniel Dobson, Broad Oak Farm, Kendal

DANIEL Dobson farms about 100 Aberdeen-Angus and Beef Shorthorn cows with his wife and other family members at Broad Oak Farm, Crosthwaite, a 202-hectare (500-acre) holding with a 250-ewe flock as well. A client of Richard Knight's, Mr Dobson began to notice calving in spring 2013 was not as it should be when there were a couple of late abortions.

"The herd calves in April/May and in the run up, we had nine cows abort just a month off full term," he says. "We'd never seen anything like it before and it was horrendous."

Previously the herd had suffered just one abortion in the last four/five years. A closed herd, both Mr Knight and Mr Dobson felt it important to take immediate and rapid action so blood testing was undertaken to find animals with signs of BVD infection. Three PIs were

identified, all of whom were culled immediately.

"A thriving and healthy calf per cow is what makes our business viable so getting on top of the issue quickly was essential," Mr Dobson says. "At the same time, we have the Oakthwaite herd of pedigree Beef Shorthorns which can be traced by to my grandfather's 1940s herd; important genetics to protect."

The spring calving season 2014 is markedly different from previous years with all calves being tagged and tested. This simple ear notch test shows the calf's BVD status which can, of course, be traced back to the dam.

"The investment in the tagging system is easy to justify as it will be considerably less than losing stock to BVD and having to test each animal on the farm; something we do not want to ever repeat," Mr Dobson says.