

# JOIN OUR CAMPAIGN TOGETHER WE CAN WIPE OUT BVD

Welcome to *Farmers Weekly's* Breakthrough BVD campaign, a sponsored series in conjunction with the national control programme BVD-Free England and Beating BVD

**B**ovine viral diarrhoea (BVD) is a highly contagious disease affecting cattle. It is the most common and costly viral disease of cattle in Europe. According to studies from Reading University it costs UK farmers £39.6m/year.

In the UK it is estimated that 87-95% of herds have been exposed to BVD virus.

But many herds remain at risk of reinfection and DairyCo vet Elizabeth Berry says farmers shouldn't become complacent.

"Until we are BVD free as a

whole country, uninfected herds are still at risk [from contracting the disease from infected herds]," says Dr Berry.

She says BVD remains a huge problem in parts of the UK because the disease is "hidden" and often goes undetected.

"It is a virulent and infectious disease and often you don't know if you are buying a persistently infected [PI] animal. Some PI animals can look perfectly normal and people can sell them in good faith – they may genuinely not know they have BVD."

BVD can have long-lasting performance implications on infected animals, and because it causes immune suppression it makes them more susceptible to other illnesses such as pneumonia.

"In a herd with BVD infection you can probably have 2-3% of those animals that won't hold to first service and another 2-3% that will abort.

"Also, if a beef cow suffers from an abortion, you have got nine months where that cow doesn't give you any income."

As a result she says the disease



BVD-free herds often have a better health status and tend to benefit from tight biosecurity measures.

## UK BVD POLICIES – A COUNTRY-BY-COUNTRY BREAKDOWN

### Northern Ireland

Animal Health NI launched a voluntary eradication programme last year. Farmers are being encouraged to tag and test newborn calves to identify any persistently infected (PI) animals and enable rapid culling.

Compulsory testing may be required from this year following a pledge from NI agriculture minister Michelle O'Neill.

### Republic of Ireland

On the 1 January 2013, following on from a 12-month voluntary period, Ireland's national BVD eradication was made compulsory. The legislation stipulates that:

- \* All newborn calves must be tagged and tested.
- \* Calves imported to the Republic of Ireland must be tested for BVD within 20 days.
- \* Additional testing is required where an animal tests positive for the virus.
- \* A ban on the movement of animals unless they test negative for the disease, except for disposal or slaughter.
- \* Livestock markets must display the results of all cattle tested on electronic display boards.



### Wales

The Animal Health and Welfare Strategy Steering Group in Wales identified BVD as a priority last year. Its purpose is to consider how the industry can address BVD in Wales and it is due to present its recommendations to the Welsh government this year.

Farming Connect is subsidising BVD testing on farms as part of a workshop between farms and local vet practices.

### Scotland

A national, industry-led eradication scheme was launched in 2010. Since then, more than 90% of Scottish herds have complied with mandatory screening.

The next stage of the programme will see herd status made compulsory and movement restrictions placed on infected cattle. Farms that fail to test will also face restrictions.

By the end of 2014, farmers will be required to test animals brought into the country for breeding.

### England

There are three regional initiatives in place:

- \* BVD Free is a national initiative involving more than 100 vet practices in the South East, Midlands and North East. It is funded by the Rural Development programme and co-ordinated by EBLEX and DairyCo. The scheme provides advice and tools to help diagnose and manage BVD on-farm.
- \* The South West Healthy Livestock Initiative provides up to 70% funding for tests and follow-up advice.
- \* The North West Dairy BVD campaign, led by the NFU and SRUC and funded by the RDPE North West Livestock Programme, offers farmers subsidised herd screening and follow-up BVD action plans.



BRIGHTON TOGS

can be very costly and will vary massively from farm to farm depending on the severity of the outbreak.

Dr Berry says that known BVD-free herds often have a better health status and in most instances benefit from tightened biosecurity measures.

"It helps control other diseases. There looks to be evidence that herds with BVD can be more susceptible to TB. They tend to excrete more TB virus."

Dr Berry believes that unless British farmers take immediate action to eradicate the disease there is a real risk of being left behind.

Sweden and Norway pursued effective, government-led eradication programmes in the late 1990s and as a result are now BVD free, she explains.

"Scotland and Ireland are already ahead of the game. When that happens you get a disparity in trading."

#### COMPULSORY ERADICATION PROGRAMMES

Since the introduction of a compulsory national BVD eradication programme in Scotland in 2010, disease exposure has been reduced from 40% to 18%.

Farm vet Den Leonard from Lambert, Leonard and May practice in Broughall, Shropshire, agrees trading could become an issue.

"Most of Europe is heading towards BVD freedom, so where we are twiddling our thumbs we will end up out in the cold when it comes to trading and our products will be sought after less than in Ireland and Scotland," he says.

"BVD is one of the cheapest diseases to test for and vaccinate against and yet it is one of the most costly diseases on farm. It doesn't make sense to live with BVD. The cost benefits of getting rid of it are

**\* It is a virulent, infectious disease and often you don't know if you are buying a persistently infected animal**

Elizabeth Berry, vet, DairyCo



massive," adds Mr Leonard.

Animal Health Ireland estimates the financial gain equates to €10 for every €1 spent on eradicating BVD.

#### WORKING TOGETHER

Mr Leonard believes the only way of beating BVD is by getting the industry to work together.

"We need a coherent representative body to take a lead on disease control," he says.

But until that happens, Mr Leonard says farmers cannot afford to wait for the governments in Wales and England to act.

"There are a lot of farmers doing an awful lot of good, but there are a lot of farmers doing nothing.

"They need to get to grip with it. It is no good waiting for the government to do something. Farmers have to decide to do something themselves."

In essence, healthy cattle will make for healthier profits – and at a time when UK beef and dairy farmers face increasing pressure on margins, no one should underestimate the benefits of introducing an eradication programme.

So, over the next two months, *Farmers Weekly* will be publishing a series of articles offering practical advice on how to detect, monitor and reduce BVD prevalence within your herd through farmer success stories and expert advice.

## BREAKTHROUGH BVD

A *Farmers Weekly* campaign to help tackle BVD infection, in association with BVD-Free England and Beating BVD

**These symptoms are all associated with BVD infection. If they are familiar on your farm, talk to your vet about screening for BVD infection:**

- \* Animals that are not thriving for no apparent reason
- \* An increased number of cases of pneumonia in calves
- \* A higher number of embryonic losses
- \* Cows more susceptible to other infectious diseases, such as IBR
- \* High empty rates
- \* A high number of cows returning to service
- \* Increased abortion rates (higher than 2%)
- \* More calves are scouring

### COMING UP IN FARMERS WEEKLY...

#### 11 APRIL

- \* BVD types 1 and 2 explained, including expert analysis of symptoms and how the disease is spread. Includes a four-step plan to help eradicate BVD within your herd.

#### 25 APRIL

- \* We take a look at what's being done in Europe to tackle the disease.

#### 9 MAY

- \* A dairy farmer shares his success story on eradicating BVD, and discusses the protocols that have been put in place to prevent BVD re-entering the herd.

#### 23 MAY

- \* We visit a beef farm to learn how BVD has been eradicated and discover what precautions have been put in place to guard against reinfection.

In association with

**Beating BVD**  
Supporting BVD FREE

# Nations draw up war plans to crush cattle virus

Bovine viral diarrhoea is a costly, but treatable disease. *Farmers Weekly* investigates how the English and Welsh governments plan to tackle this expensive and profit-sapping virus

Scotland and Northern Ireland have already put strategic national plans in place to eradicate bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD). However, England's and Wales' approaches have been more localised. DEFRA's chief vet Nigel Gibbens and the chief vet of Wales Christianne Glosop talk us through their plans for BVD eradication.

**Christianne Glosop**  
Wales' chief vet



The Welsh government is consulting on a new Animal Health and Welfare Framework for Wales and we are in the process of appointing a new board to provide strategic direction for our future work on the prevention, control and the eradication of animal disease.

This framework follows on from delivery of the 10-year *Great Britain Animal Health and Welfare Strategy*, which has now been completed in Wales, and will continue to work towards improving the welfare of kept animals and help protect public health.

A significant achievement of this earlier work was to reach agreement of disease priorities across our livestock industry.

BVD was identified as a disease priority for both dairy and beef sectors and the sub-group established to consider our approach has made good progress in considering all the options, working towards eradication.

To achieve this, and in recognition of the significant trade in cattle throughout Great Britain, we acknowledge the importance of a joined-up approach to, first, evaluate the problem and then to agree how

we might best collaborate, learning lessons from Scotland, Ireland and further afield as we develop our own plans.

While I fully support awareness-raising as part of the process, I really do believe that we must now start to take concerted action against this disease. The original *Animal Health and Welfare Strategy* was based on five key principles:

- \* Working together in partnership
- \* Recognition of roles and responsibilities
- \* Prevention is better than cure
- \* Taking account of the costs and benefits of interventions
- \* Appropriate enforcement.

I suggest we need to apply all these principles as we work together towards BVD eradication. The evidence speaks for itself. Eradication is achievable, but only if we are willing to work systematically, in collaboration and co-operation with each other right across Great Britain. The time for talking must stop – now we need action.

**Nigel Gibbens**  
DEFRA chief vet



We all recognise BVD can be a difficult disease to spot in herds. It is insidious and many of the impacts it has are not immediately apparent. Its underlying nature enables it to have a significant impact on the health and welfare of cattle.

DEFRA has made a clear commitment to improving the competitiveness of our agricultural industry; ensuring technology can be used to improve productivity while reducing the impacts on climate change and the environment.

This needs to be achieved in the face of continuing budget pressures,



## BVD STATEMENT OF INTENT

\* "We the undersigned recognise BVD as one of the biggest disease issues facing the cattle industry currently and one which is in the hands of the sector to control and eradicate. We fully back the eradication of BVD from the national cattle herd."  
NFU, DairyCo, EBLEX, Holstein UK, National Beef Association, Livestock Auctioneers, Association and British Cattle Veterinary Association

and we must target our available funds to where government can make most difference and where we are legally obliged to act.

We collectively have the knowledge and tools needed to support BVD control.

A key first step is the application of BVD control measures on individual farms to achieve BVD control and eradication, and the productivity benefits for farmers that control delivers.

This this can be accomplished by individual farmers working with their vets.

However, we all appreciate that individual action is only part of the story. If neighbours, wider clusters of farms, and regions work together to control BVD greater benefits are achieved as the disease risk is reduced for all.

It has been great to see what the initiatives, funded through the Rural Development Programme (RDP), have achieved in raising awareness, sharing knowledge and providing advice on BVD.

The national BVD steering group created by AHBD with RDP support has achieved a lot in its 15-month lifetime – 6,340 training attendees;

12,570 hours of training given; 124 vet practices are helping deliver the BVD-free programme; 788 farms tested now know their actual BVD status, and so can take appropriate action.

This is in addition to good progress made regionally through the South West Healthy Livestock Initiative and the North West Livestock Programme.

I fully support the statement of intent that the organisations, which sit on the steering group, have signed up to. I urge you to continue this great work together, in communities and nationally, with farmers working with veterinary practices.

## BREAKTHROUGH



Keep up online with the latest from our campaign to tackle BVD in Britain's herds at [www.fwi.co.uk/livestock](http://www.fwi.co.uk/livestock)