

# UK action on virus 'pathetic'

## BVD: Scottish initiative hailed but scientist says England is being left behind

BY JOE WATSON

The lack of a UK action plan to eradicate a virus which costs dairy and beef cattle producers in excess of £60million annually has been branded pathetic by a scientist.

Professor Joe Brownlie, of London's Royal Veterinary College, said the benefits of controlling bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD) – the cattle equivalent of Aids – were untold and farmers nationwide should be tackling it.

He was speaking at an NFU Scotland meeting at Maryculter, near Aberdeen, called to discuss the Scottish Government's BVD eradication programme. It will, as a first step, compulsorily force all cattle herds to screen for the virus by February next year. Other measures will follow, including possibly forcing all herds to disclose their BVD status.

Prof Brownlie said the initiative north of the border was truly exciting as

farmers here were on the verge of dealing with an endemic virus, which suppresses the immune system and leaves infected animals liable to other health problems, such as salmonella and respiratory diseases.

Prof Brownlie, one of the world's leading experts on BVD, said the virus had al-

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ready been removed in the Scandinavian nations and Switzerland without any vaccination programme. Wales has started its own initiative as have Ireland, Germany and Austria.

Prof Brownlie said England was being left behind.

He added: "They are pathetic because no one will take responsibility. They've never done anything collaboratively on a voluntary basis because they are so



EXPERT: Professor Joe Brownlie addressing the NFU Scotland meeting at Maryculter. Photograph: Kenny Elrick

used to being told by government what to do. Do not give up on this. You need to get there and eradicate this because you can then show England you can win at something."

Scottish farmers would yield huge benefits from dealing with BVD and in

removing the persistently-infected (PI) animals which spread it throughout their often short lives. They catch it as a foetus if their mother is exposed to the BVD in the first three months of pregnancy.

PI cattle are thought to

represent up to 1% of the national cattle herd.

Prof Brownlie said countries and regions which had already dealt with BVD, including Orkney and Shetland, had seen big improvements in the health of calves, improved cow fertility, more births in herds

and lower vet and medicine bills. Norway estimated its financial benefit at £14.5million a year through improved production.

Prof Brownlie dispelled many myths, notably that sheep infected with border disease, a similar infection, could reinfect cattle with BVD. That is seen by some as reason for not dealing with BVD. But Prof Brownlie said sheep to cattle infections were extremely rare and that it was more likely cattle would pass the infection to sheep. His view was that in tackling BVD it would improve sheep health too.

Prof Brownlie said Scotland's eradication programme could well force cattle producers in northern England to adopt similar strategies as cross-border trade would be hit if they did not declare their BVD status. Scotland is also considering moves which would make it illegal to knowingly sell a PI animal.

## Luing record price

A new breed record price of 20,000gn was set yesterday at the spring sale of Luing cattle at Castle Douglas, where bull and heifer averages soared on the year.

Paddy Crerar, of Newmains Farm, Dunbar, broke the previous best by 6,000gn when he bought the April 2010 bull, Harehead Mourie.

The record-priced bull was sold by Professor W. A. Penny, of Harehead, Cranshaws, Duns, Berwickshire.

Wallets Marts managing director Robin Anderson said: "Bulls were a fantastic trade."

Making 14,000gn was the 21-month-old bull Milkieron Master from D. and A. Barr of Milkieron, Braidland, Stewarton, Ayrshire, to Charlie Symons of Attonburn, Yetholm, Kelso.

● The bull average rose £2,700 to £6,874 for 19. The 169 bulling heifers sold to average £1,324, up £148, while the 49 in-calf heifers averaged £1,936, a £143 rise.