ENDEMIC DISEASE

Working together to eradicate BVD in Scotland

A mandatory programme of screening for bovine viral diarrhoea has recently begun in Scotland as part of efforts to eradicate the disease from the national cattle herd. In support of the programme, new guidance and training has been launched for the private veterinary surgeons involved, as Sheila Voas, acting Chief Veterinary Officer in Scotland, explains.

FARMERS, vets, scientists and government have been working together on creating a national bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD) eradication plan for Scotland since 2009. The Scottish BVD eradication scheme really is a partnership project and no one organisation or set of interests is in charge. The scheme we have collectively developed is in four stages: a voluntary phase with subsidised screening, mandatory annual screening, control measures, and biosecurity requirements for remaining infected herds. Since December 1, 2011, we have been in the second stage, and by February 1, 2013, every breeding cattle herd in Scotland must have been screened for BVD.

The latest milestone in Scotland’s efforts to eradicate BVD came at the end of last month, when we published a guidance booklet for vets, and launched an online training module, both to support mandatory annual screening. We have also published a booklet for farmers, with information appropriate to their needs, which has been sent to over 14,000 cattle keepers in Scotland.

The guidance booklet for vets was developed by Peter Nettelton, a former veterinary virologist at the Morgridge Institute who has over 30 years of experience with BVD. I am delighted that the BVA and British Cattle Veterinary Association (BCVA) were both happy to approve the guidance and put their names on the front cover, and I hope that, as a result, vets will feel they can have confidence in the advice inside.

The training takes the form of an online module, which was developed by

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George Caldow at the SAC in St Boswells. It is pretty robust and takes around three hours to complete and can count towards a vet’s annual CPD requirement. Before anyone can move on from one section to the next, they must pass a short, multiple-choice assessment - if they get any answers wrong, they cannot progress to the next section until they have gone back and repeated the question section successfully. The module has been thoroughly tested by a panel of vets in practice in Scotland and it was well received by all.

The training module can be accessed free of charge by vets in practice who have cattle clients who are required to screen for BVD - so that means vets in the north of England with clients in Scotland can get access too. Anyone else wishing to access it should contact George Caldow directly (telephone 0131 559 3131, e-mail: linsey.eaglesham@sac.ac.uk).

The BVD team in the Scottish Government has tried to make sure that vets have all the information they need to support the eradication efforts, and we’re always available on the end of a phone or by e-mail for any vet who has a question. In the past year we’ve delivered talks to vets from Inverness to Dumfries, and we’re also happy to visit practices to explain the scheme to clients, which we’ve done over 20 times in the past 12 months.

With regard to mandatory annual testing itself, we have made a range of testing methods available. This is for two reasons; first, Scotland’s relatively low disease prevalence means that it is important to have cost-effective ways of demonstrating BVD freedom through screening; and secondly, because there are many different ways of managing a herd as there are herds in Scotland. Blood, milk and ear tissue can all be sampled, and virus and antibody tests are available. Full details are included in the guidance booklets sent to all vets and cattle keepers, and are available online at www.scotland.gov.uk/bvd.

Samples must be sent to approved laboratories for testing, and, at time of writing, these were Biobest, AHVLA, SAC, Eclipse and Nationwide. We expect others to be approved soon.

Shared responsibility

Some vets have expressed concern that they may be held liable if a herd they have tested and found to be negative later turns out to have a BVD virus infection. We have taken great care to ensure that, so long as vets are meeting their professional standards and are not acting negligently, there is nothing to worry about. There is a shared responsibility between the keeper, the vet and the laboratory.

For instance, where a vet is doing check testing in a herd, the keeper is required to consult with him or her to identify the
That's the lesson from Orkney, where an excellent local voluntary scheme in one of Europe's most densely stocked cattle regions fell just short of complete eradication. The industry tells us that a compulsory national scheme is the only way to ensure that everyone can fully benefit, and we are happy to provide our support.

**Next steps**

This spring, we will consult on the next stage of the Scottish BVD eradication scheme. There are three main proposals to consider:

- A ban on knowingly selling persistently infected cattle;
- Requiring herd or animal status declarations before sale or movement; and,
- Movement limitations on 'not negative' herds – this could be regionalised and phased.

We'll be working closely with the BVA and BCVA in developing the details of this next phase, but we want a great deal from vets in practice feeding back to us their views and experiences, so we would appreciate responses from as many vets as can find the time to do so. I will write to all livestock practices in Scotland when the consultation paper is published, and we will make an online response form available to make it as easy as possible to reply. Even if someone has no specific points to make, it is always important to us to know whether people actually support the eradication effort.

We've come a long way to get to the point where we have legislation before the Scottish Parliament, guidance for all vets and farmers, and training materials online. From now on the success of the scheme will depend entirely on the extent to which vets and their clients work together to remove BVD from each herd. The philosophy behind the strategy is that it allows farmers and vets to take BVD eradication into their own hands, rather than the heavy hand of bureaucracy going round the countryside testing everything in sight. Regardless of national schemes and legislation, farmers will improve profitability and herd wellness by getting rid of BVD. Working together with their vets, it's something they can all achieve.

- More information on Scotland's BVD eradication scheme and access to the CPD module and guidance booklet is available at www.scotland.gov.uk/bvd. The BVD team can be contacted by e-mail: bvd@scotland.gsi.gov.uk, or by telephone on 0300 244 9623.

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