

**BVD Technical Working Group Meeting
(sub-group of the Cattle Health & Welfare Group)**

Time & Date: 10:00am, 11th of May 2012

Location: Yellow Meeting Room, Ground Floor, Eastwood Building, Stoneleigh Park.

Present

Mary Vickers (EBLEX)
Catherine McLaughlin (NFU)
Joanne Pugh (NBA)
Hugh Black (DairyCo)
Elizabeth Berry (DairyCo)
Poppy Frater (EBLEX)
Dylan Laws (EBLEX)

By conference call

Jonathan Statham (part of the time)
Hazel Wright, FUW (part of the time)

1. Evaluation of Current Schemes in UK & Ireland and the EU

The group discussed current and previous BVD schemes from the UK and other EU member states.

EU

It was decided that, although BVD schemes from mainland Europe (including Scandinavian countries, Holland and Germany) provided some useful evidence about the utilisation or non utilisation of vaccines, the basic scheme delivery systems could not be directly applied in England & Wales. The majority of schemes in the EU were national eradication schemes that required a relatively larger budget than is available in England & Wales.

Scotland

The Scottish BVD eradication scheme was perceived to be too complex for the majority of farmers to actively engage with. The longevity of the scheme was also questioned. A concern was raised that the scheme may result in an influx of persistently infected (PI) animals into England and it was agreed that steps should be taken to reduce this risk.

Ireland

The Irish scheme was reviewed and recent data indicated that the scheme was making progress (latest PI rate of 0.6%). The success was attributed to the utilisation of the tag and test sampling method and the approach to eradication, although it was recognised that this project is still at an early stage.

Wales

HCC's BVD scheme, delivered by the WRVC and funded by the RDP for Wales remains open. The funding deadline has been extended to August

2012. It is possible that uptake has been lower than expected although this has not been confirmed by either HCC or the WRVC.

Regional

Existing regional schemes in England were deemed to have great potential and worth investigating with regards to developing a BVD control plan in England and Wales. It was suggested that to further the success of regional schemes, support must be increased through publicity and raising awareness. It was also agreed that if a nationwide BVD control plan were to consist of regional areas, the schemes must be coordinated centrally whilst also minimising bureaucracy.

Vaccination

Reports from BVD eradication schemes in Scandinavian countries concluded that banning the use of vaccination was successful and reduced complications. The German eradication scheme initially made vaccination mandatory in BVD-free herds to minimise the risk of spread, however it is believed that they are now phasing out this policy.

It was strongly felt that due to the unique stratification and movement of cattle in the UK industry (resulting in increased risk of transmittance) in comparison to other EU countries, vaccination would need to play an important role in any control plan to prevent the spread of BVD in 'BVD-free' herds. The group did agree that the use of vaccines should be voluntary and, clear and consistent guidelines should be issued to encourage effective use. It was emphasised that there is a need for best practise guidance on vaccine use, acknowledging that some guidance already exists. It was also decided that these guidelines should be issued to the entire industry (including pharmaceutical companies, veterinarians and farmers).

2. Testing Methods and Laboratory Feedback

Testing to identify PI's

Although all available methods appear to be effective and efficient it was concluded that the 'tag & test' method used successfully in Ireland appeared to be the most efficient when considering costs and practicality. As the method of 'tag & test' involves specialised tag applicator equipment it was recommended that some level of training should be given to farmers to increase the quality of samples and improve efficiency. It was concluded that a meeting should be held with all associated parties to discuss further developments.

Action: Eblex - How long and how can samples be kept until they can be sent to the labs (i.e. how does the system work in all year round calving systems)?

Animal Health Ireland: It is recommended that samples are stored for a maximum of 7 days before being sent off for analysis. However, they do state that samples kept for a longer period may not necessarily deteriorate but the

prolonged period of time a PI animal would be present on farm could be detrimental to the herd (Appendix 3).

Action: E Berry to coordinate - meeting with all associated parties associated with 'tag & test' (Appendix 1).

The issue of a national database was discussed and it was felt that this could only be managed if a legislative scheme was in place as there would generally be a small minority of farmers who may not release information.

Testing to monitor herds

It was suggested that 'BVD-free' herds could be monitored using bulk milk tests (Dairy) and abattoir spot checks (Beef). Monitoring through blood testing could coincide with TB testing.

Laboratory Feedback

The quality of laboratory feedback was discussed. Concern was expressed about the lack of information included in laboratory feedback of tag and test results. It was suggested that this could reduce the effect of BVD control schemes as farmers may not utilise the results effectively. It was agreed that interpretation of results is an important issue and should involve a vet or suitably qualified advisor who knows the farm and understands BVD control. It was emphasised that the farm-vet relationship must be good.

Laboratory feedback is currently issued direct to farmers; however, issuing copies of results direct to the vet/consultant could increase communication and reduce the risks of mismanagement. It was noted that HCC's BVD scheme required a consent form signed by the farmer and veterinarian before farmers were eligible for funding. It was discussed that there could be room to use a mentoring format as has been used in previous schemes.

3. Livestock Auction Centres

It was suggested that to reduce the risk the spread of BVD, livestock markets could insist that all cattle presented for auction provide a BVD status. This is something that one livestock market in the North East of England have already introduced to reduce the risk of PI cattle being brought in from the Scottish eradication scheme. NFU guidance on the legal position associated with selling a PI animal is shown in Appendix 2.

It was agreed that livestock markets played a pivotal role in the control of BVD and they should be consulted at a later date when an England and Wales control plan had been drafted.

Action: Joanne Pugh – Identify the livestock market in North of England that insist on BVD status.

4. Funding

It was considered unlikely that Defra would provide any funding towards a national (England and Wales) BVD control plan. It was suggested that Rural Development Plan for England (RDPE) funding could be available towards the end of 2012 and that there may be a way of directing some of that funding towards an England and Wales BVD control scheme.

Action: Eblex – To investigate the possibility of RDPE funding towards BVD control scheme.

It was suggested that funding should be provided towards mapping the prevalence of the disease in England and Wales as a means of identifying problem areas, whilst also providing evidence of progress with disease control which would be required by RDPE.

The group concurred that funding should be considered for training specialists and veterinarians along with farmers (collecting samples). Veterinarian training could contribute to CPD training to encourage its uptake. It was noted that the Scottish BVD eradication scheme required veterinarians to pay to attend a BVD training course.

It was also decided that there should be no compensation given for slaughtered PI's as it could be excessive. It was noted that BVDV is not a zoonotic disease.

It was suggested that funding for some testing might be helpful. However it was also recognised that the cost of testing may not be a deterrent of uptake. There was a poor uptake of the HCC scheme even though funding was provided towards testing.

5. Legislation

The question was raised, would there be a need for legislative measures in the future. It was agreed that there may be a need for legislation sometime in the future if England and Wales intended on becoming BVD-free as there would be some producers reluctant to take part in a voluntary scheme.

6. Knowledge Transfer

It was agreed that knowledge transfer would be a key component of any BVD control plan. It was agreed that all knowledge transfer material produced should provide consistent messages to all groups involved across the regions (pharmaceuticals, vets and farmers). This would include:

- Leaflet (could tie in with RUMA 'Responsible use of vaccines')
- Help-line (technical support)
- Training
- Presentations
- Meetings

- Publicity

Action: Jonathan Statham to discuss leaflet on BVD vaccination with Joe Brownlee.

7 Participation of Industry Bodies

Concern was expressed about the lack of involvement of Welsh body representatives in the meetings and that different groups are pursuing BVD strategies but not communicating with each other. Hazel suggested that she could discuss this issue with the Welsh AHWSSG board on the following Monday 14th of May to which the group agreed. It was discussed that HCC had been invited to participate in the CHWG meetings but had declined on more than one occasion for various reasons. It was agreed that attempts to involve HCC in the meetings should be continued.

8 Scheme Options

The group produced two options for BVD control in England & Wales with the preferred option being a regional approach on a National scale. The alternative option would consist of a National approach.

The group acknowledge that there is still a lot of development work required on which ever option is favoured, but judged that this was better done after the CHWG member's had agreed a preferred approach.

8a Regional Approach (Preferred Option)

A regional control programme to coordinate regional initiatives run by the vets, farmer groups or other organisations. The approach would be flexible to incorporate existing regional initiatives and work to encourage uptake and establish new schemes.

- The scheme would be voluntary
- Each region would possess its own regional hub (user defined)?
- It would build on existing regional programmes
- The approach and key messages would be consistent and possibly tie in with wider herd health planning messages and the promotion of biosecurity principles
- Regional champions (Vets/Farmers)
- Funding activities would include:
 - A national project manager (would act as a admin manager and would not need to be a specialist)
 - Funded CPD training or similar incentivised scheme for vets (eg training only funded if trainee subsequently enrolls 5 active farmers to the scheme)
 - Farmer meetings and knowledge transfer activities and resources

8b National Approach

A government backed approach aimed towards eventual regulation that would replace all existing schemes in England and Wales. The approach is likely to have a lower response rate than that of a region by region approach; however, a mass compulsory uptake of the scheme would eventually result in more effective response.

- One national central database that would track PI's to slaughter.
- Auction centres would not be permitted to sell PI's.
- The formation of approved PI units which can legally purchase PI animals and finish on farm.
- Alongside joining the scheme farmers would have to agree to:
 - Only sell PI animals directly to slaughter or to approved PI units.
 - Announce the farm disease status and vaccination status at auction.
 - Follow strict protocol of testing and monitoring procedures.

Appendix 1

List of all relevant parties to attend 'tag and test' meeting.

- Milk testing labs
- MSD (Tim Zoch)
- NMR/Nordic Star
- Novartis
- Allflex

Appendix 2

Information produced by Catherine McLaughlin on behalf of the NFU's legal team

BVD is not a notifiable disease in England, and I am not aware of any legislation specifically banning the sale of animals infected with BVD.

There may be contractual issues – for example if an animal is sold as being free from diseases (or something similar) it could potentially be argued that there has been a breach of contract if the animal is subsequently found to be a PI. Similarly, if a buyer has specifically asked about the BVD status of the animal or the herd that the animal is from and is told that it's clear, but it is subsequently discovered that this is not the case, the purchaser may be able to bring a claim for breach of contract/misrepresentation against the vendor. This would be a civil matter, so the vendor would not be committing an offence, but may be liable in damages if a purchaser was to pursue a claim. This would have to be considered on a case by case basis as it would depend on the precise nature of the agreement entered into. Misrepresentation may be harder to establish if the vendor had the animals checked by his own vet before purchasing them, as then it could be said that he was relying on the expertise of his own vet to confirm the health status of the animals rather than the representations of the vendor (there may in some cases be a negligence claim against the vet in these situations).

However, a breach of contract/misrepresentation claim is unlikely to be successful if the purchaser did not specifically ask about the BVD status of the animal/herd or if the vendor did not make any assertions about the animal being disease/BVD free. It may also be that the damages awarded do not reflect the full extent of the losses incurred by the farmer.

This approach would, obviously, rely on individual farmers bringing claims in respect of their own contracts/agreements with the vendor.

If the vendor was specifically stating that animals were BVD free and/or came from a BVD herd, when the herd did in fact have BVD and the animal was a PI then trading standards may be interested as the animal would not satisfy the description it was advertised with. However, Trading Standards is only likely to become aware of an issue if there are several reports of problems with animals coming from the same vendor.

There may also be issues with false advertising if a farm is specifically promoting its stock as being BVD free when that is not in fact the case (e.g. if the farm has a website on which it states that its herd is BVD free).

Other than the above, I am not aware of any legal provisions which would prevent the sale of an animal infected with BVD in England.

| Appendix 3

<http://www.animalhealthireland.ie/page.php?id=119>