

# The BVD eradication journey



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**T**he national BVD eradication programme started in 2013, following a voluntary phase during 2012. Prior to the programme, BVD was talked about, but advice on how to handle cases at farm level varied.

Individual farms that were well managed and had the virus suffered ongoing health issues in stock, such as pneumonia, scours, lack of thrive and even mortality. They often incurred significantly higher health costs. The other side of the disease that often went unnoticed was the mental torture that farmers endured as they struggled to treat sick animals and worried about the impact the disease would have on future cashflow.

Thankfully though, we have seen real progress in reducing the disease incidence on Irish farms. Animal Health Ireland (AHI) has played a central role in bringing this about, so I spoke with Maria Guelbezu, BVD programme manager with AHI, and asked her a number of questions about the progress made to-date, the main hurdles in progressing eradication and what farmers can expect over the next few years from the BVD programme at farm level.

## What progress has been made with BVD eradication since 2013?

The BVD programme has been really successful in reducing the number of BVD-positive animals in Ireland. In 2013, 66 out of 1,000 calves were BVD-positive, while in 2020, only three in 1,000 were. On 30 December

2020, there were only 13 BVD positive calves alive, three of those retained for over three weeks. This meant that many counties did not have any living BVD positive animals.

## What have been the greatest hurdles in achieving progress?

The main issue since the start of the programme has been the retention of PI (persistently infected) animals on-farm. It was first noticed during the voluntary phase, and confirmed by subsequent studies, that the non-removal of these calves was one factor significantly associated with retaining herds having further BVD-positive births in the following year.

The BVD Implementation Group (BVDIG) reviews and enhances the programme every year, to further accelerate progress towards eradication. The focus is on the prompt testing of calves and removal of positive animals, prevention of onward spread from positive herds and testing animals of unknown status, including those born before 1 January 2013.

## What can we expect to happen with the BVD programme between now and 2023?

Such has been the progress of the programme that the BVDIG plans to apply for the recognition of the Irish programme in Europe in 2021. For this, the programme must align with the new European Animal Health Law (AHL), which comes into force in April 2021.

This law sets out the requirements for recognition of a BVD eradication programme and BVD freedom at EU level. All being well, the proposal will be able to meet the conditions for 'freedom' by 2023.

This includes having negative herd status (NHS) for 99.8% of all herds (currently over 95% of breeding herds have NHS) representing at least 99.9% of cattle. Achieving this would



bring to an end compulsory tissue tag testing for the majority of herds after 2022. To achieve this goal, the BVDIG has developed a series of enhanced measures to:

- Maximise the proportion of herds (including non-breeding herds) with NHS.
- Rapidly identify and resolve the small number of herds with positive/inconclusive results in 2021 and 2022 and minimise the risk of onward transmission of infection.
- Outlined below are key messages for all herds in 2021. The focus is on the prompt testing of calves and increasing the proportion of herds with NHS by testing animals of unknown status, including those born before the 1 January 2013.
- Tissue tag testing remains compulsory for 2021.
- Tissue tag test all calves as soon as possible after birth. Where positive or inconclusive results are obtained, remove these promptly to obtain the higher level of financial support provided by DAFM. Confirmatory testing of these animals is no longer permitted.



ing three measures by a nominated trained private veterinary practitioner (PVP). They will begin three weeks after removal of the animal with positive or inconclusive results, and are fully funded by DAFM/RDP.

**-Whole herd test.** Blood sampling and testing of all animals in the herd with negative results, or removal of any further virus-positive or inconclusive animals identified.

**-Epidemiological Investigation.** Conducted under the Targeted Advisory Service on Animal Health (TASAH) within the Rural Development Programme.

-Vaccination of all female animals aged 12 months old and above by the nominated PVP.

•Continued herd measures. Following lifting of restrictions, herds are required to:

-Continue to tissue tag test for a minimum of 24 months after the removal of the last animal with positive or inconclusive results.

-Continue the vaccination programme in the herd over the following year, with this again delivered by the PVP and funded by DAFM.

-Not sell any potential trojan female i.e. one that was in calf at the time of birth of the animals with positive or inconclusive results until its calf has been born and tested for BVD.

### What is the current level of financial support for removing positive calves in 2021?

DAFM will provide the following financial supports to encourage the prompt removal of animals that test positive for BVD virus in 2021:

#### Beef Herds

A payment of €220 for each beef breed PI born in a suckler herd that is shown to be disposed of to a knackery, meat plant or abattoir within 10 days of the first test.

A reduced payment of €30 will apply in respect of such calves disposed of to a knackery, meat plant or abattoir between day 11 and 21 of the first test.

#### Dairy Herds

A payment of €160 for each dairy heifer or dairy-cross PI calf born in a dairy herd that is shown to be disposed to allow removal to a knackery, meat plant or abattoir within 10 days of the first test.

A reduced payment of €30 will apply in respect of such calves disposed of to a knackery, meat plant or abattoir between day 11 and 21 after the first test.

A payment of €30 for each dairy bull calf born in a dairy herd that is shown to be disposed of to a knackery, meat plant or abattoir, 14 days after the first test.

- Negative Herd Status – Herds must be free of confirmed cases for 18 months instead of 12 months. This change is necessary to align with the AHL.

- Test animals of unknown status to obtain NHS – Around 5% of herds contain small numbers of animals that either do not have a valid test result or have not yet produced a negative calf. The presence of these animals prevents herds from attaining NHS and accessing lower cost testing. It is now a legal requirement to test animals of unknown status born before 2013, in addition to those born after this date.

- Review biosecurity to minimize the risk of accidental introduction of the BVD virus. Focus on the movement of animals, people (including the farmer) or equipment across farm boundaries.

### If I get a positive result when I test my calves this spring, what will happen?

The small number of herds in 2021 that will have positive or inconclusive results will be subjected to a control plan that will include the following:

- Immediate herd restriction and neighbour notification. DAFM will restrict movement both in and out. While restricted, movements out of the herd to slaughter or to non-breeding herds may be granted on a case-by-case basis under permit by the RVO, provided that the animals move directly to their destination.

- Neighbouring herds will immediately receive a biosecurity notification informing them of their increased risk, and on a monthly basis thereafter; in the absence of the removal of animal(s) with positive or inconclusive results.

- Isolation and removal of all animals with an initial positive or inconclusive test result – re-testing of these animals is no longer permitted. They must be removed promptly to obtain the higher level of financial support provided by DAFM.

- Cleaning and disinfection of buildings and handling facilities that may have been contaminated as soon as practicable, but in advance of the next breeding season.

- Restrictions will be lifted following completion of each of the follow-