

Calf testing initiative launched to offer significant step forward in UK-wide BVD control



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Nationwide eradication of Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) - one of the most profit-draining infectious diseases of cattle - moved a significant step closer with the launch of a new calf testing and monitoring scheme at Beef Expo.

With essential critical mass from the outset provided through the

backing of the 53-strong UK-wide group of XLVets veterinary practices, 'CHECK TAG BVD' will promote the testing of calves and provide verification of a negative test result for the disease through a central and fully accessible online database. CHECK TAG BVD is simple to use; a sample is taken during the normal tagging of new-born calves, or alternatively

pre-movement. Significantly, the scheme will include the use of branded white tags as part of the testing procedure in order to provide an easily identifiable and highly visible prompt for calf buyers to check test results before purchase.

As Dan Humphries of XLVets member practice Lambert, Leonard and May explains, the main aims of CHECK TAG BVD is to improve the identification of source farms and reduce the risks of persistently infected (PI) calves moving from unit to unit, thereby stemming the spread of the disease.

"BVD is primarily spread by PIs, which are calves born from cows that are infected with BVD," says Dan. "These PI calves often appear normal but will spread infection to other cattle that they come into contact with. It's therefore critical that we remove these animals from the breeding herd and also ensure that they are not sold into other herds.

"By identifying PIs, ideally shortly after birth and certainly before they move from their home unit, we can minimise the spread of BVD and also offer more targeted control programmes in herds that are identified as infected."

The scheme is entirely voluntary with farmers first having to make the decision to use the tissue sample testing technology to initiate the process. The white CHECK TAG BVD tags are available

from a number of tag suppliers, with tissue analysis either done by the vet practice or through a central laboratory, depending on the type of tag used. Cost is estimated to be approximately £5-6/tag, which includes the laboratory testing.

Once calves have been tagged and tissue samples analysed, results will be recorded via the farm's veterinary practice onto a central CHECK TAG BVD database. This database - which in future will be accessible from any smart phone through an APP - will then provide verification of all calves testing negative through the scheme.

"The scheme is effectively being piloted on a significant scale through XLVets member practices, but any farmer (not only clients of XLVets practices) will be able to access the database from the outset," adds Dan. "The ultimate aim is that all practices will have the option of participating in the scheme, with the database being hosted independently, thereby allowing the branded white tag to become a universal symbol to promote BVD awareness and prompt positive action to remove PIs."

The CHECK TAG BVD scheme is being sponsored by MSD Animal Health

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