

AHWNI marks programme anniversary with new website launch



This week marks eight years since the launch of compulsory legislation to eradicate BVD and coincides with the launch of AHWNI's new website. As an industry-led, not-for-profit organisation, AHWNI's aim is to benefit ruminant livestock producers through providing up-to-date knowledge and co-ordinating the control of selected endemic diseases. The new website has been designed to provide key animal health information to the Northern Ireland ruminant sector.



In addition to co-ordinating the BVD Programme, AHWNI also manages the voluntary Johne's Disease Programme with more than 2,200 herds participating in it. The organisation has also co-ordinated the 2023 Sheep Scab project in conjunction with Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) and has provided training for farmers on reducing the risks of Anti-Microbial resistance. AHWNI intends the new website to be a developing repository of information on animal health for cattle and sheep farmers.

Overall, farmer compliance with the animal health schemes that are in place has been excellent. In the lifetime of the BVD Programme, all stakeholders have continued to work well together to achieve the progress that has been made, with consensus on the strategy being pursued. Industry continues to call for the introduction of new legislation that would have the potential to dramatically reduce the risk of the BVD virus being transmitted from breakdown herds.

Latest BVD Programme data shows that the incidence of BVD infection at the individual animal level has fallen by two thirds and that herd level prevalence has fallen by three quarters since the end of the first year of the compulsory programme. Recent years have seen substantial progress. During 2023, 545 NI cattle herds had BVD Positive results disclosed compared to almost 1,000 herds in 2019.

The current statistics are encouraging and demonstrate that many herd owners have been making responsible decisions to isolate and cull BVD Positive calves. The BVD virus is highly contagious. All Persistently Infected animals shed massive amounts of virus and therefore pose a major risk to other cattle on their holding as well as to cattle on neighbouring premises. Therefore timely identification and removal of infected animals is the key to disease control. In those herds where the eradication of BVD has been taken seriously, many farmers are seeing improved herd health in terms of better fertility, calf health and animal performance.

Note for editors:

1. The new AHWNI website may be viewed at www.animalhealthni.com.

2. For more information, please contact AHWNI (email info@animalhealthni.com, tel. 028 7963 9333).