

AHWNI Stakeholder Newsletter – Summer 2024



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Public good resulting from control of endemic livestock diseases

Dr Sam Strain, CE AHWNI

The 'Acting on Methane' Report produced in April 2022 by the Moredun Research Institute for the Ruminant Health and Welfare Group was a landmark report that indicated that an improvement in cattle and sheep health would reduce methane emissions, possibly by as much as 10%, and thus contribute to the Global Methane Pledge made at COP 26. It pointed out that "Improving animal health and reducing associated methane emissions is something we can do now; with the knowledge and tools we already have available." The 'Reducing UK Emissions 2018 Progress Report to Parliament,' stated that proposals set out in the Clean Growth Strategy, for example, regarding tackling endemic cattle diseases, should be turned into firm policies. This report identified improved animal health as an important GHG abatement measure that government and industry must include in any strategy to ameliorate agriculture associated GHG emissions.

So, while the improvement of farm profitability remains an important driver for reducing disease burden, and one of AHWNI's core aims, there is now an overwhelming 'public good' driver for reducing disease in livestock. There is an opportunity for industry to develop a world leading approach to disease control – to raise NI ruminant animal health and welfare status to an internationally recognised world beating level.

In this newsletter, we provide an update on work that is being done by AHWNI to support local disease control initiatives. Most encouraging is the substantial success of the NI BVD programme which has led to the lowest incidence of BVD in Northern Ireland ever recorded. The Johne's Control Programme for Dairy Herds continues to make very good progress with most dairy herds within Northern Ireland now participating in the programme.

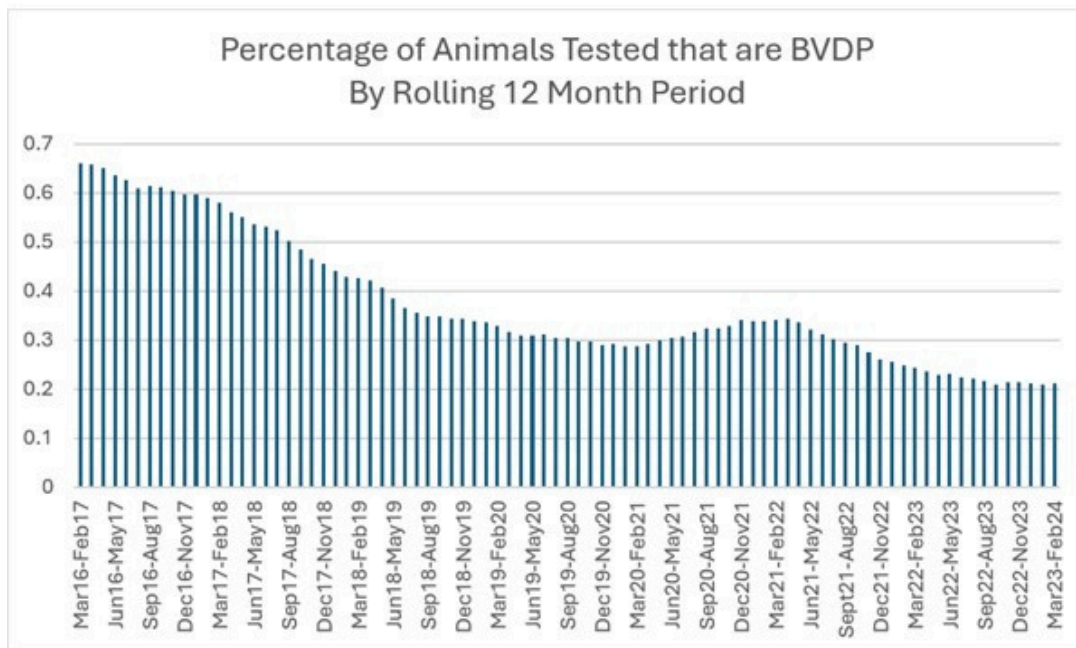
A crucial part of AHWNI's work is the provision of trusted information on endemic diseases within Northern Ireland. To help facilitate this AHWNI recently launched a new website which has been designed to provide an easy to access range of useful information to farmers and their veterinary advisors.



BVD Eradication Programme Update

Sharon Verner, Programme Manager

BVD eradication is a priority for industry stakeholders, given the animal health, financial and environmental gains to be made. The rolling herd incidence of BVD has maintained an overall downward trend since 2021. This has been done through several strands: consistent messaging, provision of the knowledge that will encourage farmers to identify and cull Persistently Infected (PI) cattle for the benefit of their herds as well as associated and neighbouring herds, and ongoing engagement with DAERA, as we work towards the introduction of a range of further measures essential for the ultimate eradication of the infection.



Graph 1: Rolling 12-month rolling animal level prevalence.

The 12-month rolling animal level prevalence at February 2024 is 0.211%.

Graph one illustrates that BVD levels are approximately one third of what they were at the start of the compulsory programme. Ongoing limiting factors to progress are the circulation of virus within herds, circulation of virus between herds and possible illegal movements of infected animals.

New BVD legislation

Herd restrictions are one of a range of measures for which industry have been calling for over several years, to remove the risk of infected animals or 'Trojan' females (carrying a BVD Positive calf) triggering breakdowns in other herds. Steps are being taken by DAERA to progress the necessary legislation, which will have to be scrutinised by the EU. The timescale for the introduction of additional statutory measures such as the notification of neighbouring outbreaks, so that biosecurity measures may be taken, or the application of BVD herd level statuses have yet to be agreed. The BVDIG continues to call for these essential steps to be implemented, so that the gains that have been made can be consolidated.

AHWNI continues to issue advisory letters and to contact affected farmers by phone where possible, to discuss the implications of BVD breakdowns. In hotspot areas, AHWNI issues text messages to inform herd owners of potential risks to herds, recommending that steps are taken to maximise biosecurity precautions. There remains a determination within the cattle industry and by veterinary surgeons across NI, expressed through the BVD Implementation Group, to ensure that all the necessary means are provided that will allow an acceleration of progress towards eradication.

Johne's Disease Programme Update

Dr Sam Strain

The AHWNI Johne's Disease Control Programme (JDCCP) is a voluntary Programme that aims to provide a bespoke platform for herd owners and their veterinary advisors to identify and address infection risks specific to each herd. Authorised Veterinary Practitioners (AVPs) conduct advisory visits, delivering Veterinary Risk Assessment and Management Plans (VRAMPs) on farm using a web portal which is accessible by smart phone and follow up risk review visits.

To date approximately 3,000 VRAMPs have been completed by around 170 veterinary practitioners that have undergone AHWNI training. Preliminary analysis of the programme has been conducted as part of a QUB PhD studentship. Key findings of this study indicated that many of the risks assessed as part of the programme are real and experienced by many NI dairy herds. These include significant risks of infection introduction, establishment and spread within a substantial proportion of dairy farms. Indeed, there is a strong association between the presence of several risks assessed and the likelihood of Johne's Disease being reported as being present in the herd. Some of the risks the study highlighted include:

- Multiple cows in the calving area at the same time
- Cow and calving environment cleanliness
- Calving area used for the hospitalisation of sick animals
- Failure to segregate Johne's positive cows at calving.

These findings provide good evidence that the VRAMP addresses appropriate risks and provides a valuable platform for allowing farmers and their veterinary advisors to discuss and address farm specific risks.

As part of a European Innovation Partnership project, which AHWNI was awarded and led on, AHWNI engaged with an IT supplier to develop an improved platform for Vets and their clients to engage with the JD Programme. This new platform allows Veterinary Practitioners to undertake VRAMPs using smartphone technology. It provides farmers access to their VRAMP findings and recommendations as well as allowing benchmarking of findings against aggregated data from other herds. A further function within the system allows farmers to generate a certificate of compliance, which can be used as part of farm quality inspections such as Red Tractor.

To support the programme AHWNI delivered eighteen talks to Business Development Groups across NI during the winter period. The talks covered the disease itself, how to interpret tests and updates on the programme.

Medicine Use Forum

Dr Sam Strain

AHWNI established the NI Medicines Use in Farm Animals Forum during 2024 in order to facilitate focussed discussion and engagement on the use and control of antimicrobials including anthelmintics within the Agri-Food Sector in N. Ireland and on measures to ensure that they are used appropriately in regard to animal species, production type and clinical need.

Specifically, the forum aims to:

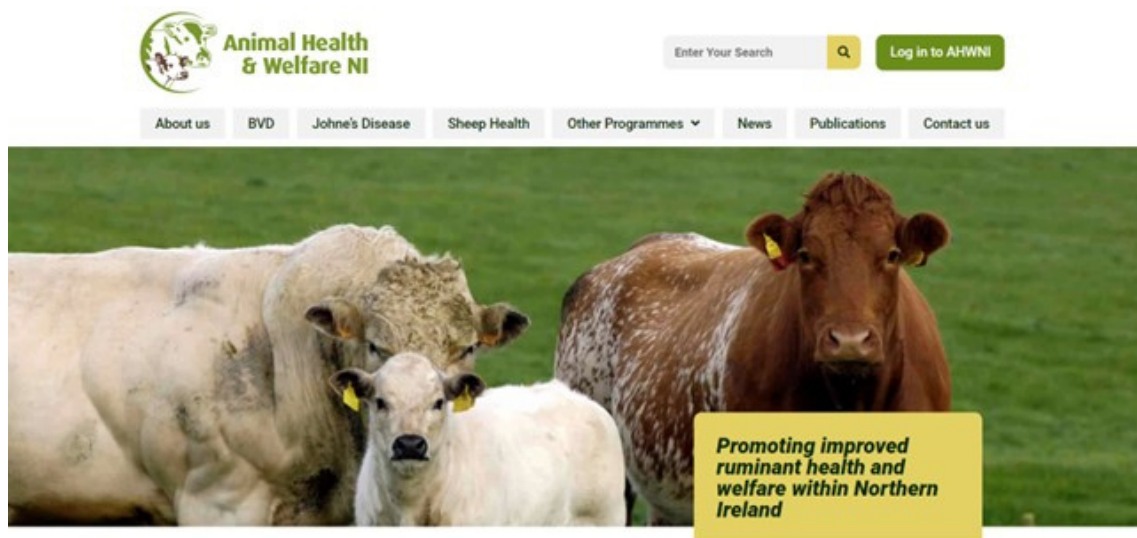
a) provide a mechanism for the discussion of medicines use between key stakeholders, notably: producers, processors, knowledge exchange providers, veterinary practitioners, veterinary suppliers, researchers, government, and other relevant agencies.

- b)** review relevant research and development focussing on the application of research to optimise medicine use.
- c)** review current or proposed private and public sector policies and programmes that have or may have a direct or indirect effect on medicines use.
- d)** as necessary provide advice or guidance to government and industry bodies on livestock medicine use.
- e)** assist in the dissemination of knowledge across the industry through the participating organisations within the group and others where appropriate.
- f)** collaborate with colleagues in other jurisdictions with similar aims.
- g)** liaise with medical counterparts or takes cognisance of strategies for medicine use mitigation within the medical profession in NI.

The Membership of the Forum is open to nominees from bodies representing farm animal health and welfare stakeholders and other interested parties such as research organisations and DAERA.

AHWNl Website

AHWNl has now completed an entire re-design of its website. The new website provides much easier access to information and is intended to become the go to online resource for farmers and their veterinary advisors on endemic disease within Northern Ireland. The website can be found at www.animalhealthni.com.



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| AFBI | Dairy UK | NI Livestock Auctioneers' Association |
| AgriSearch | Dale Farm | NIMEA |
| AHWNl | Datamars | NIVA |
| Aurivo | Draynes Farm | Nordic Star |
| AVSPNI | Fane Valley | Ritchey |
| CAFRE | Glanbia | Shearwell |
| Countryside Services Ltd | Lakeland | Strathroy |
| | LMC | |