

Cattle sector collaboration with BVD Project



Local input from the cattle sector was provided to a team of experts who visited NI earlier this week to gather information for a project that will support efforts to eradicate Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) across the UK. The project, which is funded by a government research council, is being run jointly by the University of Nottingham's School of Veterinary Medicine & Science, and Scotland's Rural College (SRUC). It aims to develop a BVD simulation model that will be applicable to all sectors across the UK cattle industry, a model similar to that used to help reduce the incidence of BVD in the ROI.

Visiting NI were Professor Jonathan Statham (Professor of Sustainable Livestock Health & Welfare, Harper and Keele Veterinary School, Chair of the Animal Health & Welfare Board of England and Chief Executive of RAFT Solutions), Dr Amy Jackson (Researcher, University of Nottingham) and Dr Sam Beechener (Research Fellow, SRUC). A focussed workshop took place with farmers from the dairy, suckler and beef sectors, and agricultural students from CAFRE Greenmount, and was facilitated in part by Animal Health & Welfare NI (AHWNI).

With a particular focus on BVD, and having a research-industry partnership in place, the overall project represents a unique and exciting opportunity for all four nations of the UK to collaborate in the control of what is a highly infectious endemic disease of cattle and it offers multiple beneficial insights to BVD control within Northern Ireland. The project aims to enable elements of co-design during the development of the model, by involving farmers from each region who can provide their unique perspectives.

The modelling framework will be capable of simultaneously modelling cattle populations within farms, the movements and geographical relationships between farms, the different national BVD control programmes and it will incorporate the behaviours of different stakeholders (farmers, vets, and programme bodies) and farming systems across the entire network. The final results will be presented to stakeholders and the model evaluated on its ability to produce informative and impactful outputs capable of influencing stakeholder behaviour and of shaping future endemic disease eradication programmes.

For farmers and our future agriculturalists, cattle health impacts not just profitability, but also access to markets, sustainability, and morale. This project aligns with the local BVD Implementation Group's objective of achieving BVD eradication; the inclusion of farmer views and decision makers as the project proceeds will help to ensure the outcomes of this project will be tailored to deliver the greatest benefit possible.

Further information on the project is available at www.bvdplatform.org.



Photo caption:

Attending the farmer focus workshop in Co Antrim recently (L-R):

Jonathan Statham (RAFT Solutions), Sharon Verner (AHWNI), Anna McCready (CAFRE Student), Kathryn Henry (CAFRE student), Sam Strain (AHWNI), Sam Beechener (SRUC)