

# **Biosecurity discussions open the door for BVD management**

A BVD update by Dr. Joanne Holter,  
Livestock Technical Manager at MSD Animal Health

# **If the current *M. bovis* outbreak has taught us anything, it's the importance of biosecurity.**

## **Conversations about biosecurity will certainly assist with the eradication effort, but will also aid in the control and management of endemic New Zealand diseases, such as BVD.**

BVD is still costing farmers more than \$150 million a year. In a survey of 304 farms carried out over 2015/2016 and supported by MSD Animal Health called "Take the BVD Test Challenge", BVD risk factors were identified. These included factors like nose-to-nose contact over boundaries, sharing facilities and movement of cattle between farms.

None of the farms recruited in the survey had a BVD management plan in place and about 50 percent of the young stock mobs tested, both beef and dairy, showed evidence of active BVD infection. What was particularly interesting was that poor biosecurity was reported on many farms. Only 2% of farmers reported completely closed herds and 14% reported frequent nose-to-nose contact with animals from other farms. Perhaps even more alarming was only 52% of farmers reported that BVD control measures were regularly implemented on service bulls used with heifers.

It's been a timely reminder for cattle farmers to be more aware of their disease status with BVD and take special care when moving animals on and off the property and bringing animals into the herd. With the realities of modern dairy and beef cattle herd management, the opportunity to protect against disease by running a completely closed herd may be extremely limited.

Where stringent biosecurity alone can't adequately protect a herd or is impossible to be sure of, vaccination still has an important role to play and there is some good news to share on that front.

The first thing is that the label claim for Bovilis® BVD vaccine has been extended in a couple of ways that will help increase protection and convenience of vaccination timing.

The ACVM label claim for duration of fetal protection against BVD is now 12 months following a third dose (annual vaccination) – the only registered vaccine to offer that (Approved September 2017). That's important for both beef and dairy because this extension of protection means the creation of PI calves is extremely unlikely. Whether conception is achieved at the first, second or third mating, the extended coverage means the risk period for PIs or congenitally infected calves is well and truly covered.

The second change with the label claim for Bovilis BVD is that the interval between the first (sensitiser) shot and the second (booster) is now anywhere between 4 weeks and 6 months. That will give all cattle farmers a lot more flexibility, but it's especially important for beef herds where handling can be minimal and sometimes difficult to achieve at key vaccination times. Fitting vaccination in with routine management will now be that much easier.

It's long been considered that BVD is something we have to manage and live with as a country, but it's been exciting to see work being done at Massey's Epicentre to investigate the feasibility of BVD eradication.

It's an important project, which will continue through until 2020. It is building a better picture of BVD infection in New Zealand using modelling, filling gaps in our knowledge about BVD in beef herds, and sharpening up diagnostic strategies to help more easily identify and deal with PIs.

This follows work in several European countries, where eradication programmes have significantly decreased the number of infected farms whilst increasing animal production and increasing profits for cattle farmers.

Over time, any New Zealand eradication programme would involve many organisations, but most importantly, it will need buy-in from cattle farmers. That is where you as veterinarians have a crucial role and I'm delighted to see the campaign to eradicate BVD from New Zealand cattle herds has just switched up another gear with the launch of the BVD Free New Zealand research project website.

**As vets there are three ways you can be involved:**

1. Complete a short online survey about your BVD experiences by 15 July. You can also take part in an interview on BVD eradication.
2. Encourage your clients to test for BVD and develop a management plan (there is free funding for pooled serum testing available for the first 500 enrolled beef and dairy herds, between 15 July 2018 and 15 May 2019)
3. Tag your submitted blood samples for antigen ELISA or PCR tests to give the okay for a molecular study of BVDv strains (also between 15 July 2018 and 15 May 2019).

There's more detail at: [www.bvdfree.org.nz/get-involved](http://www.bvdfree.org.nz/get-involved)

Contact [c.gates@massey.ac.nz](mailto:c.gates@massey.ac.nz) for further information.