



Bovine disease can be wiped out

Beef cattle and dairy farmers are being asked to help design possible disease control schemes for bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD). Massey University and the national BVD steering committee of the Veterinary Association have published an innovative website questionnaire and talked to Hugh Stringleman about the campaign.

Widespread bovine viral diarrhoea infectious cattle disease costs New Zealand farmers an estimated \$150 million a year, money that could be saved if a national eradication scheme is successful.

Massey University epidemiologist Carolyn Gates said unlike other infectious cattle diseases such as Johne's and tuberculosis, effective tools are available to clear BVD and other countries have done so.

But Gates and national BVD steering committee chairman Roger Ellison said a national eradication scheme is not their call.

The dairy and beef cattle industries, especially farmers themselves, will need to know the scope, costs, benefits and timeframe for moving from voluntary to more co-ordinated controls.

An informed decision can then be made about future schemes.

Hence the new campaign to encourage farmers to contribute their own experiences with BVD, especially those with tailored management plans.

A third of dairy farms and two-thirds of beef farms are actively infected with the virus.

For many farmers BVD sits in the too-hard or not-now baskets and some believe in natural vaccination – allowing a persistently infected animal to spread disease exposure.

Ellison, a veterinary pathologist and Waikato dairy

farmer, said the more information the project gathers the better the support that can be provided to help manage the disease.

“Every farm has different management styles, risk factors and priorities that will influence what the optimal strategy would look like for their herd.

“We want to create a new system that empowers farmers to shape the future of managing animal health issues that impact their business in a way that will have the biggest impact for industry at the lowest cost to individual farms.

“Farmers can tell us what is working for them. We know the prevalence of the disease is dropping on dairy farms but on beef farms we just don't know.

“In my opinion BVD has been costing the cattle industry far too much, for far too long,” he said.

On his own 70ha, 225-cow Matamata dairy farm and separate runoff, BVD-related spending is \$1500 to \$2000 a year.

That includes vaccinating yearling heifer replacements, screening all keeper calves and testing new animals like breeding bulls. On the plus side, after an earlier outbreak of disease both properties are now BVD-free and have been double boundary fenced recently to help guard against *Mycoplasma bovis*.

Unlike *M bovis*, the diagnostic test for BVD is 99.9% accurate and the identification and disposal of infected cattle results in a disease-free herd.

Ellison has chaired the association's BVD committee since 2011 and has seen a lot of progress in that time.

For example, it is now rare to see a breeding bull advertised for sale without a BVD-free certificate, which in itself has resulted in a big reduction in the disease's spread.

“BVD has been costing the cattle industry far too much, for far too long.”



NEW AGE: The bovine viral diarrhoea steering committee wants to create a new system to empower farmers to shape the future of managing animal health issues, chairman Roger Ellison says.

The steering committee has also co-ordinated veterinary opinion on BVD so conflicting advice is not being given to farmers.

Project manager Gates, a senior lecturer in epidemiology in the School of Veterinary Science, said BVD control is a challenge but achievable with farmer help.

“We know based on the experiences from seven European countries with national BVD control programmes that this can substantially improve herd health and performance.

“But we also know NZ pastoral farming systems are very diverse and certainly very different from the intensive production systems in the northern hemisphere.

“So the one-size-fits-all BVD control frameworks that have worked in Europe may not be the most cost-effective or practical here.

“That is why we are asking as many farmers as possible to tell us how BVD currently impacts their business and what control measures would be practical for them to implement so that we can build a better picture of the BVD situation here and make more intelligent decisions around disease control,” Gates said.

The results from the computer simulation models based on this information will be presented to farmers and the industry in July 2019 allowing them to choose a strategy with the biggest long-term benefits for everyone.

Options include continuing voluntary control, phased compulsory control over several years and fast-track, mandatory control as quickly as possible using legislation.

Gates, who trained in the United States and Scotland, said a big attraction of her Massey appointment was a chance to help design a national disease control scheme, if it is what farmers want.

While in Edinburgh she used data from the Scottish equivalent of NAIT to plan a BVD eradication scheme.

The on-farm biosecurity aspects of *M bovis* will be applicable to BVD so farmers will make progress on both fronts.

“We have good BVD vaccines and good diagnostic tests, unlike *M bovis*.”

Farmers who want to be involved in the campaign can register at bvdfree.org.nz/getinvolved

Information will be gathered from farmers for 10 months from now to May.

Reprinted from *NZ Farmers Weekly*, www.farmersweekly.co.nz
6 August 2018. Words by Hugh Stringleman.



DOUBLE WHAMMY: The on-farm biosecurity controls for *Mycoplasma bovis* and bovine viral diarrhoea are the same so farmers can make progress on both, Massey University lecturer Carolyn Gates says.