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## **Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute to introduce a Cattle Health Scheme**

The Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute (AFBI), Veterinary Sciences Division (VSD) is introducing a Cattle Health Scheme for four of the most common and economically important infectious diseases of cattle in the United Kingdom and Ireland.

**The diseases covered under the AFBI Cattle Health Scheme will be:**

### **Infectious Bovine Rhinotracheitis (IBR)**

The main outcome of infection with IBR virus is respiratory disease, which can be particularly severe in housed beef cattle. Pneumonia and reduced milk yield can also occur in dairy herds. Because recovered bulls are carriers and may shed virus in their semen, they are also excluded from AI centres. A number of European countries have already obtained freedom from IBR, while others have control programs or other measures in place. EU rules already give IBRV-free countries protection to prevent reintroduction.

### **Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD)**

The BVD virus can result in a wide range of clinical signs. In calves, it causes scour and pneumonia while in older cattle it can cause reproductive

problems, including failure to conceive, abortion and birth defects. Calves that survive infection during early pregnancy are born persistently infected and are the main source of infection for other cattle. Many persistently infected cattle die in the first two years of life from a condition called mucosal disease. Persistently infected bulls are excluded from AI centres due to the presence of virus in their semen. Several other European countries, as well as other regions of the United Kingdom, are already well down the road of successful eradication programs. It is possible that BVDV-free countries will seek to ban imports of cattle from non BVDV-free regions.

### **Johne's disease**

Johne's disease causes chronic wasting and scour in adult cattle. Although infection usually occurs early in life, disease is not normally seen until animals are at least two years of age. The slow nature of the infection means that eradication from affected herds can be a long process, and it is important to identify and protect uninfected herds to maintain their disease-free status. The Scandinavian countries are considered free of infection in cattle. Unfortunately, in other countries, the level of infection is already such that eradication schemes have made little progress.

### **Leptospirosis**

Leptospirosis is a recognised cause of abortion and infertility in cattle and can also cause illness in humans. Despite widespread use of vaccine infection remains common. A control program exists in The Netherlands, where more than 98% of dairy herds are now free of infection, although progress in beef herds has not been as rapid.

### **How will the scheme work?**

The AFBI Cattle Health Scheme will be run as a partnership between herd owners, their veterinary practitioners and AFBI. The scheme will follow the rules laid down by Cattle Health Certification Standards (CHeCS), a self-regulatory body set up by the cattle industry. The main benefit to

participating herds will be improved animal health and welfare, leading to economic benefits due to reduced losses. Certified free cattle can also be expected to obtain a premium at sale. Control of these diseases will also ensure that bulls are not excluded from stud and help protect access to international markets.

Herd owners may test for any or all of the diseases at the same time. For each disease, herds may join at different levels, depending on circumstances and status:

### **Monitoring programmes**

This is the lowest entry level and requires only routine testing of bulk tank milk samples for BVD, IBR or leptospirosis. This gives a good assessment of the initial health status of the herd, and of changes in this status over time. Herd owners may then choose to follow a program of control and eradication and finally accreditation of disease-free status.

### **Screening and Eradication programmes**

These programmes aim to reduce the effects of the diseases within herds and over time lead to freedom and accredited status. Depending on the disease and herd type, test programs may include blood, milk or faeces samples. Culling, vaccination, biosecurity and husbandry factors can all help reduce the prevalence in infected herds.

### **Accreditation programmes**

The aim is to demonstrate that the herd is free from a given infection, to maintain that freedom and to certify the herd as free to allow the sale of accredited-free stock. To keep accredited status for a given disease, herds must continue to follow the scheme rules and to conduct regular sampling of selected cattle.

## **Vaccinated monitored free programme**

This is only available for BVDV and is aimed particularly at commercial herds selling stock for finishing.

For further information on the AFBI Cattle Health Scheme please contact Dr. David Graham, Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute, Veterinary Sciences Division, Stoney Road, Stormont, Belfast, BT4 3SD. Phone: +44 (0) 2890 525749 or Fax: +44 (0) 2890 525787 or email [Info@afbini.gov.uk](mailto:Info@afbini.gov.uk) or check our website [www.afbini.gov.uk](http://www.afbini.gov.uk) or visit the AFBI/DARD marquee at the National Ploughing Championships, Tullamore in September.

## **Notes for Editors**

- 1. NR06-07-140-1: With the AFBI Cattle health Scheme, herd owners can test for any or all of the diseases at the same time.**
- 2. NR06-07-140-2: The AFBI Cattle Health Scheme will be run as a partnership between herd owners, their veterinary practitioners and AFBI and will follow the rules laid down by Cattle Health Certification Standards.**
- 3. All Media Enquiries to AFBI Press Office 028 9025 5636.**