

Sheep & Beef Talk

May 2018



New research on BVD in Beef Herds

Across the country there is a research project underway looking into BVD in beef herds and if it can be eradicated from New Zealand.

So far the project has involved blood sampling 75 beef herds from across New Zealand who have not been doing anything to manage BVD, before mating in late 2017. Of these, 32 herds (43%) were classified as being actively infected with BVD and 382 animals (34%) showed evidence of prior infection with BVD virus. In an actively infected herd there is a very good chance of having persistently infected (PI) cattle present.

In about a third of actively infected herds, less than half of the R3 heifers were immune to BVD prior to the start of mating. This means that if any of these animals were exposed to BVD during the mating period, they were at risk of aborting or creating PI calves.



From some early-scanning herds that have been re-sampled we know this has happened. This can have big economic impacts on your herd by reducing reproductive performance for the current season (low in calf result) and by keeping the BVD transmission cycle going if new PI animals are born into the herd later this year.

This also suggests that leaving PI calves in the herd as "natural vaccinators" may not be effective if the virus spreads too slowly to expose all at-risk breeding animals before the start of mating. Slow spreading of the virus is more likely in extensively farmed beef herds.

The project is now following these herds to see what has happened to the scanning percentage and trialling different management options.

You will be able to track the progress of the BVD Free research studies and get access to more information about controlling BVD in your herd through our new project website (www.bvdfree.org.nz), which is scheduled to go live soon. If you have any questions about BVD, have a chat to your local VetEnt vet.

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How's your copper?

Now we are well into autumn, and with winter on its way, it's the perfect time to consider copper levels and supplementation. Copper is needed for many processes in the animal body and deficiency can have a big impact on growth and production.

There is a significant seasonal change in copper levels with animals having the lowest levels in late winter. For this reason it is important to identify levels before this and prevent any deficiencies. Because copper levels also vary a lot between animals it is important to take at least 10, but preferably 15 samples. True deficiency will show up on a blood test but to gain a better understanding of your levels a sample from the liver - where copper is stored - is best. Liver coppers can be tested on cull cows through the abattoirs or by doing a simple liver biopsy. Your VetEnt team can supply these forms for you.

Once a need for supplementation has been established there are two main options to choose from:

- ▮ Copper bullets – this is the most effective option as it provides long term slow release of copper. They come in a variety of sizes and are the preferred option, especially for younger stock.

- ▮ Copper injection – this is given under the skin and lasts for around three months. Being injectable, this is often the easier option; however, precautions need to be taken when using copper injections.
 - It is important that copper injections are not given within a month of mating as a temporary decrease in fertility has been proven after injection.
 - Local reactions can occur at the site of injection and care should be taken to not inject into the muscle as this will result in a nasty reaction and possible copper poisoning which can kill cattle and sheep.
 - Copper injections should be avoided in stressed/unwell animals or those with significant liver damage due to facial eczema.
 - Do not give copper injections at the same time as administering any other products, especially drenches containing levamisole (e.g. Eclipse, Boss, Switch) or lice products containing organophosphates (e.g. Tempor).

Act now and take the opportunity while we are out and about scanning cows for us to grab a few bloods, liver biopsy some cows or younger stock and pick our brains to check your copper programme is doing the job.

