



Buying cattle? – and avoiding BVDV

A ‘cunning’ little bug could deflate the excitement that comes with bringing home some new beef and dairy cattle genetics this spring.

It’s the seedstock buying and selling season for many producers; and it’s a risky time for introducing Bovine Viral Diarrhoea , caused by bovine pestivirus, onto farms.

The virus, also commonly known as BVDV, has existed in Australia for over 40 years; 90% of Australian herds show evidence of past or present BVDV infection.

Though, it can be avoided with a focus on biosecurity.

The incentive for not having it is very high – BVDV is the cause of irregular abortion ‘storms’ and can cause production losses of between 25-50% in infected herds by reducing conception rates, calf survival, weaning weights and rates, feed consumption and weight gain.

NSW DPI Senior Principal Research Scientist, Dr Peter Kirkland, says BVDV can appear to be complex.

“It’s a cunning virus that affects animals differently, according to age.

“Carrier animals are infected for life and they are the reservoir of the virus in nature.

“Carriers are produced when the dam is infected with BVDV in the first trimester of her pregnancy, then the calf is born infected, and remains so for the rest of its life - these calves are known as PI – Persistently Infected. They excrete massive amounts of virus.”

He says one of the virus’ tricks is that a recently affected pregnant cow can appear healthy and happy, and nobody suspects a problem.

“It’s only when that calf is born that you find that it’s infected and is spreading the virus.

“While many of these calves end-up dying, some survive to become carriers as heifers and steers, and cows and bulls.

The long term shedding of massive amounts of virus by these carrier animals is how the virus ensures its own survival.

Dr Kirkland has spent more than 20 years researching BVDV spread and how to stop it.

“We now know a lot more, and we have the tools to prevent loss and the diagnostic techniques to identify affected and non-affected animals.

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“Some countries are undertaking eradication, but that’s light years away in Australia. Our focus has to be on control and prevention- a combination of biosecurity, farm management and vaccination.”

The key aspects of BVDV are:

- The virus can get into a herd very easily
- The predominant impact is in the breeding herd
- Within herd transmission is hard to manage without vaccination

“Producers need to know the BVDV status of their breeding herd; we recommend producers get a herd-profile done to identify the levels of susceptibility or immunity.

“If cows have been exposed to the virus, (and have natural immunity) there’s no need for vaccination for BVDV.

“If they have not already been infected with the virus, a producer should maintain a very high degree of biosecurity for the herd and consider vaccinating immediately.”

A BVDV biosecurity checklist includes:

- Vendors: elite animals or breeding stock should be tested to ensure they are not Persistently Infected and are sold as “fit for purpose”
- Purchasers: - ask for a health statement for bought-in stock prior to arrival - quarantine new animals for a suitable period to observe health and behavior
- Be aware that a pregnant cow can be carrying an infected calf – and this cannot be detected until it is born
- Minimise contact with any potential carrier animals during agistment, or mingling with other animals at sales, events, on stock routes or over the neighbour’s fence
- Review agistment practices to ensure minimal risk of importing the disease
- Check that animal husbandry equipment is cleaned and disinfected before and after use to prevent virus spread
- Ensure all staff understand and follow measures for the prevention, identification and control of infectious diseases, including BVDV.
- If you suspect BVDV disease, consult with your veterinarian as soon as possible
- Park vehicles away from places where animals frequent, such as yards, gateways, lanes and paddocks so that the virus is not spread if it does enter the property

Guidelines for the investigation and control of BVDV infection in beef and dairy herds and feedlots have been developed by the [BVDV Technical Advisory Group \(TAG\)](#). The recommended diagnostic testing and control measures can be tailored to individual herd situations.

For more information, see: <http://www.bvdvaustralia.com/understanding-bvdv/biosecurity.aspx> or bovine pestivirus at <http://www.farmbiosecurity.com.au/diseases.cfm>

If you see anything unusual on your property call the Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline on 1800 675 888 or the Exotic Plant Pest Hotline on 1800 084 881.

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