Prospects for a control programme for England?

The vast array and differences between BVD eradication programmes both within the UK and into Europe was captured at the recent BCVA (British Cattle Veterinary Association) Congress in Leicestershire.

Defra’s Christine Middlemiss outlined the range of approaches, leaving delegates from England and Wales perhaps wondering at what point there would be some clarity and consistency.

Acknowledging Scotland is due to enter stage four of its programme, Ms Middlemiss commented on the fragmented control programmes in England and Wales, saying without a more joined up approach, a Government-led eradication programme was not on the cards.

“Defra’s guidelines give four reasons for intervention:

- Public health.
- Social and economic reasons.
- Animal welfare.
- Trade impact.

“BVD doubtless leads to significant economic losses. This, coupled with the insidious nature of the disease and the time lag between exposure to the virus and animal effect ought to promote BVD as a disease Defra should be more involved with.

“If the industry can work together, giving Defra clear and non-conflicting messages about disease control with one national group responsible for a programme instead of the fragmented situation we find ourselves in currently, we will listen,” she explained.

With a well-established control programme in Scotland, producers are aware of their herd’s BVD status and this is captured on a database. Although Wales and Northern Ireland are making headway on eradication, no such databases exist and testing/surveillance is largely voluntary.

Ms Middlemiss said: “It was disappointing to read feedback from some BVD FREE meetings in England from farmers who said they knew the BVD status of their herd as they vaccinate. This is absolutely not the case and demonstrates the need for more education, adequate funding and a database of all herds.

“If industry can get most farmers to undertake BVD control, we [government of the day notwithstanding] will consider making supportive legal provisions in terms of a national control programme.”

Past BCVA president and vet from XL Vet practice Bishopton Vet Group, Ripon, Jonathan Statham pushed Ms Middlemiss on when funding for an English programme may be made available and what format that would take. Responding, she said: “There is the prospect of an a BVD plan for England in 2015 provided the relevant RDPE criteria are met.”

Commenting later on this, Mr Statham said: “There has been a huge amount of hard work done by farmers and cattle vets over the last two years with the BVD FREE Campaign. The current interim RDPE funding is supporting positive co-ordination of this campaign, with the work of the North West and South West initiatives that were also RDPE supported.

“It feels as if there is a genuine window of opportunity to bring all stakeholders together to work in partnership with government to begin to deliver a joined up BVD plan for England at last.”