

The most expensive cow you ever bought?

Could the next cow you introduce to your suckler herd be the most expensive one you ever bought? A computer model recently developed at SAC¹ and based on best available expert knowledge suggests that if that cow is persistently infected* (PI) with BVD virus then it could cost an averaged sized 60-cow herd about £21,000 over a 10 year period and cause another 300 BVD incidents on the farm! More details are shown in the following table:

Cumulative losses over 10 years due to one cow persistently infected (PI) with BVD introduced to an unvaccinated BVD free 60-cow beef suckler enterprise.

Source of loss	Number of animals affected over 10 yrs	Losses (£)
TI** heifers	100	5542
PI cows and heifers	10	4311
PI calves	19	3895
TI cows	62	3432
Aborting cows	7	1553
Extra disease in calves	60	1458
Calf performance	43	1193
Totals	301	21384

The biggest source of losses is from 100 TI heifers. Most will show no obvious symptoms, a few may require veterinary attention and there is a very small risk of more serious complications. Only 10 PI cows and heifers are expected but the majority will incur heavy losses. The small number of PI calves has a high cost due to poor performance and high mortality. TI cows, like TI heifers will be numerous. However, about 7 TI cows are expected to abort, resulting in much greater costs per cow yet these may not be attributed to BVD. Extra disease in calves is caused by the tendency for BVD to increase susceptibility to other diseases such as scour and pneumonia. Again BVD can easily go undiagnosed in these cases and most BVD experts believe that this effect is more serious than the cost conservatively estimated here.

Important points to note are the wide range of losses involved and the high proportion that are likely to go unnoticed or not be attributed to BVD. Also note the long duration of the epidemic, despite the assumption in this case that no further PIs are introduced. These attributes of a typical BVD epidemic mean that its impact on a business can be under estimated by the



farmer. Remember it could also be your new bull, a replacement calf or in-calf heifer that is infected with BVD. If you suspect that your herd has been in contact with BVD, or you notice an increase in other diseases then you should consult your veterinary surgeon immediately. It may save you a small fortune!

¹ Gunn, G.J., Stott, A.W., and Humphry, R.W. (2004). Modelling and costing BVD outbreaks in beef herds. *The Veterinary Journal*, 167, 143-149.

* Persistently infected (PI) cattle may show no signs of disease but shed BVD virus that can spread to other cattle.

** TI – Transiently infected animals often do not show clinical signs and are only affected for a short period of time.

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