



*"As a flying herd, we were not only facing the risk of bringing diseased cattle onto the farm, but we were also in danger of exporting disease to other herds. We therefore felt a moral responsibility to protect ourselves and others."*

Phillip Jones, Owner and Manager, Lan Farm

## Three-Step Eradication Plan with Allflex TST Keeps Carmarthenshire Beef Herd BVD-Free

### BACKGROUND

Phillip Jones runs a spring calving, organic suckler herd of 110 Limousin cross cows, plus followers at Lan Farm, located in Carmarthenshire, South Wales. In the past, his ambition to increase the herd to 140-150 cows had been hampered by a BVD outbreak, which not only caused a decline in cow numbers and impaired the herd's productivity, but also put significant financial strain on the farm business.

### CHALLENGES

In 2009, Phillip was running 120 cows as a flying herd. However, persistent health issues, including a particularly bad outbreak of pneumonia, were having a detrimental effect on the herd's fertility and growth rates.

"As well as the obvious signs associated with pneumonia, we were also seeing symptoms such as dull and lifeless newborn calves which wouldn't suckle with any vigor," Phillip describes. "Fertility rates and daily live weight gains had dropped off and we were struggling to maintain a viable business."

"At first we didn't know what was causing the herd to be so out of sorts and put it down to 'one of those things' that happens in livestock farming. In hindsight, we'd had an underlying problem for several years. When we started to see more and more empty cows at scanning, we knew we had to find out once and for all what was causing the herd's poor performance."



### AT A GLANCE

Company: Lan Farm  
Location: Carmarthenshire, Wales  
Herd size: 110 Limousin cross suckler cows

#### Challenges

- Recover from a disease outbreak that damaged herd performance and threatened to decimate the farm
- Increase the herd size
- Prevent the spread of BVD in the future

#### System

- Allflex Tissue Sampling Tags (TST) are used on every animal at birth as part of a three-step BDV eradication plan

#### Benefits

- Farm was officially accredited BVD-free
- Herd's overall health has drastically improved and sucklers are performing much better
- Calving period is down from eight months to three months
- Calving interval is down from 404 to 371 days
- Heifers are calving at two years instead of three years due to faster growth rates
- Herd expansion is back on track
- Now selling 95% of stock to repeat buyers

In the winter of 2009-10 Phillip asked his vet, Helen Scott from Carmarthen Veterinary Centre, to investigate further by taking blood samples from the entire herd, including the breeding bulls to see if she could diagnose what was causing the problems. "It was an expensive exercise," admits Phillip, "but the blood tests confirmed that a large proportion of our breeding and young stock was infected with BVD (Bovine Viral Diarrhea)."

## SOLUTION

With the cause of the herd's problems established, a simple, but effective plan to eradicate the disease and to protect against future infections was put in place.

"We removed any BVD positive animals from the herd and quarantined any PI (persistently infected) animals prior to their disposal," Phillip explains. "We then initiated the first two parts of a three-point disease eradication and prevention plan by vaccinating the entire breeding stock and converting from a flying herd to a closed herd."

Once the herd was BVD-free, Phillip wished to remain cautious and introduced a third step to his BVD eradication scheme: "When we first vaccinated against BVD, the use of tissue sampling ear tags (TSTs) was relatively new, but we immediately saw how they could benefit our business. We now use Allflex TST tags on every animal at birth to ensure they are BVD-free."

## BENEFITS

"I know we probably don't need to be quite so cautious, but for a nominal cost per animal, the Allflex TST tags give me extra peace-of-mind by knowing that each and every animal on the farm is clear of the disease."

Closing the herd immediately prevented Phillip from being able to re-build cow numbers. "We had stopped buying replacements, but were still culling as normal and were down to just 90 cows," he continues. "At the time, we were calving fresh heifers at three years, so it took four years before we started to see numbers increase. It was financially crippling for us as we had less stock to sell each year, but still had to cover our bills and mortgage."

Even now, with 110 breeding cows, the herd still isn't back to its 2009 size, although it was officially accredited as being BVD-free in 2013.

"That's a fairly quick turnaround," Phillip continues. "The herd's overall health has improved hugely and our sucklers are performing much better than they used to. We've also managed to tighten our calving period from more than eight months down to just three months thanks to an improved calving interval which has gone from 404 days to 371 days.

"We're also calving our heifers at two years instead of three thanks to faster growth rates – which is our best indicator of herd performance. It also means cow numbers are rising at a faster rate and we're finally back on-track to expand the herd to 140-plus cows.

As for what he plans to do going forward to keep his herd BVD-free, it's pretty clear. "It's difficult to change a winning combination and I'm simply not willing to risk taking another backward step, especially as we now have faster growth rates throughout the whole system," Phillip says.

"In fact, our system is performing so well that we're now selling 95% of stock to repeat buyers, some of whom are willing to make deals over the phone without seeing the animals. That speaks volumes about the quality and consistency of the animals we're producing and, in my mind, justifies our ongoing vaccination and tissue testing regime."



### About Allflex Livestock Intelligence

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