

*"We're running as a closed herd and are proud to be producing traditional, high-quality meat to the very highest welfare standards, with the entire herd consistently testing disease free."*
Charlie Sutcliffe, Co-Owner and Manager, Tetford Longhorns

# Allflex Tissue Sampling Tags Help Safeguard Tetford Longhorns from BVD

## BACKGROUND

Charlie Sutcliffe manages a herd of 82 purebred English Tetford Longhorns in the Lincolnshire Wolds, in England. He established the herd with his wife, Debbie, in 1993 when the breed was very much on the endangered list. The herd is reared at grass, with all animals bred with a specific purpose in mind: either for herd replacements, pedigree sales, or as commercial beef for the family's butcher's shop, Meridian Meats, in nearby Louth.

## CHALLENGES

Since 2015, all heifers and bulls sold as pedigree breeding stock have been traded privately, with Charlie using online outlets and social media to advertise animals for sale. "Advertising online is easier and cheaper than travelling to markets, and reduces the herd's exposure to outside sources of disease and infection," Charlie explains.

Maintaining the herd's disease-free status is a priority for Charlie. "Not only to keep the herd as productive as possible," he says, "but also to ensure we can sell animals at the best price. In days gone past, it was relatively uncommon for cattle to be sold as 'BVD-free'. Now it is accepted that if you want to sell animals as breeding stock, you have to be able to prove they are healthy."

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## AT A GLANCE

**Company: Tetford Longhorns**
**Location: Lincolnshire Wolds, England**
**Herd size: 82 purebred English Longhorns**

### Challenges

- Provide proof that pedigree breeding stock is disease-free
- Ensure sale of animals at the best price
- Prevent potential spread of BVD to the rest of the herd
- Supply the farm's butcher's shop with quality meat

### System

- Allflex Tissue Sampling Tags (TST), applied to each newborn calf

### Benefits

- Can now guarantee that cows are BVD-free
- Easier to sell pedigree bulls and heifers at their true market value
- Testing each newborn calf for BVD prevents disease outbreaks
- Ensures a reliable source of meat for the farm's butcher's shop

Prior to attending a BVD-awareness meeting in December 2016, Charlie's protocol for assessing the health status of his stock was to do a blood test on each sale animal for four main diseases: Johne's Disease, Infectious Bovine Rhinotracheitis (IBR), Leptospirosis, and Bovine Viral Diarrhea (BVD).

"I had an average-at-best understanding of how BVD can affect daily live weight gains in youngstock and reduce the fertility of adult cows," Charlie explains. "But more so, I had relatively little knowledge in terms of how the disease can pass from a pregnant cow to her unborn calf, thereby creating an animal which will act as a reservoir for the disease and potentially spread it to the rest of the herd." This new understanding, made him understand that a better system for testing was needed.

## SOLUTION

According to Charlie: "What the BVD-awareness meeting taught me was that unless you test for BVD as a matter of routine, not just when an individual animal is ready to be sold, it is impossible to know if the disease is present within the herd as the virus doesn't always show visible symptoms."

He has subsequently started using Allflex Tissue Sampling Tags (TST) to take a sample of tissue from each newborn calf's ear at the same time the identification tag is attached.

## BENEFITS

Using Allflex TST on newborn calves gives Charlie quick and accurate results. "I apply the tag within 24 hours of the calf being born and post the tissue sample off to be tested," he says. "Within a few days, I know with 100% certainty whether that animal is BVD-free. So far, we haven't had any positive tests, but if a result did come back as positive, I'd immediately be able to react by segregating and removing the infected animal to mitigate risk to the rest of the herd."

Charlie still does blood tests on pedigree animals for the four key diseases prior to sale, "to provide definitive proof that every animal I sell is totally disease-free." For further safeguarding, he also vaccinates his team of show animals against BVD ahead of show season.

"The biggest biosecurity threat to my herd is when I take show animals off the farm," he explains. "To minimize the risk of infection, my show team is vaccinated to ensure they can't bring the virus back with them. Vaccinating can't cure the disease, so I'll also isolate the show animals when they return, just to be sure they can't cross-infect any other animals with anything harmful."

As for applying tissue sampling, Charlie sees the Allflex Tissue Sampling Tag solution as a fast and easy way of assessing his herd's BVD status. "I've got to tag each animal anyway, so it makes sense to take a tissue sample at the same time," Charlie says. "I put an official ID tag in the right ear of each calf, and use the tissue sampling tag as the secondary tag in the left ear.

"The really clever thing about tissue testing, is that if a newborn calf tests negative for BVD, you can be confident its mother is also BVD-free. This means that by the time each female has given birth, you've very quickly tested the entire herd. That makes it easier for me to market my stock and gives me peace-of-mind that there are no nasty BVD surprises lurking around the corner. It also means I can supply our butcher's shop with enough quality meat, without having to worry about BVD reducing the herd's productivity."




To obtain tissue samples for BVD testing, Allflex Tissue Sampling Tags are applied to the left ear of all calves within 24 hours of birth. Official tags are applied to the right ear.

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About Allflex

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Allflex, part of MSD Animal Health, is the world leader in the design, development, manufacturing and delivery of solutions for animal identification, monitoring and traceability. Our solutions empower farmers to act in a timely manner, to safeguard their animals' health, while achieving optimal production outcomes for a healthy food supply.

Through its commitment to the Science of Healthier Animals®, MSD Animal Health offers veterinarians, farmers, pet owners and governments one of the widest ranges of veterinary pharmaceuticals, vaccines and health management solutions and services. MSD Animal Health is dedicated to preserving and improving the health, well-being and performance of animals and the people who care for them.

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