

BENEFITS BEGIN AT HOME FOR HIGH HEALTH STATUS HERDS

For the pedigree Charolais herd of Clifton Park Farms near Tenbury Wells, owned by J.M. Robinson, high health status is firstly important for maintaining performance at home, with any benefits in terms of boosting the value of breeding stock at sale being secondary.

As herd manager Paul Burgess explains, the key is to monitor the health status of all breeding stock and maintain effective biosecurity and vaccination protocols, particularly in relation to infectious diseases such as BVD, IBR, leptospirosis and Johne's.

"We are members of the Premium Cattle Health Scheme run by SRUC and work closely with Belmont Vets in monitoring our youngstock and maintaining routine vaccinations," he says. "All our youngstock are blood tested for BVD and IBR at 12 months of age and at the moment all our adult cattle are vaccinated against BVD with Bovilis BVD and leptospirosis with Leptavoid-H. We are currently assessing risk factors and considering including IBR vaccination for our breeding females.

"The only animals that we buy in are stock bulls, and these are placed in isolation until we have the results of blood tests confirming their high health status. We aim to keep bought-in bulls well away from any other cattle on the farm for a month, just to be sure we are not introducing any infectious diseases."

The 40-cow pedigree herd, operating under the Cliftonpark and Shamleys prefixes, is managed in two distinct calving blocks in autumn and spring. The main breeding stock that are sold are pedigree bulls, either through private on-farm transactions or through pedigree sales held at various breed society sales. Bulls from the herd are often attracting prices of £4,000 - £5,000.

"Maintaining high herd health status is more about how it benefits our own performance," he adds. "We first started to look hard at potential problems like BVD when assessing the impact these diseases can have on susceptibility to other challenges, and specifically bovine TB. We are in a TB area and by keeping BVD and other challenges at bay we believe we are better protected."

Dominic Alexander of Belmont Farm and Equine Vets is certainly in agreement, and says the overall approach taken at Clifton Park Farms is one that the majority of herds would see benefits from.

"When a herd has BVD circulating there is likely to be a reduced immune response in affected cattle," he explains. "This is likely to leave these cattle more susceptible to other disease challenges such as scours, pneumonia and bovine TB.

"At Clifton Park Farms, a lot is being done to protect the breeding herd, and that will be paying dividends across the board."



Herd manager Paul Burgess (left) is working closely with his vet Dominic Alexander of Belmont Vets to maintain high health status in the pedigree Charolais herd at Clifton Park Farms.