

LEADERS DISCUSS NATIONAL CATTLE HEALTH PROGRAMME

ANIMAL academics and vets have debated the merits of an industry and Government-led organisation that would seek to control endemic disease in England's herds.

Speaking at BCVA Congress, Joe Brownlie, a professor in veterinary pathology at the RVC and a bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD) expert, proposed the idea as a way of helping the country get on top of endemic diseases blighting the national herd.

Taking Animal Health Ireland as an example, which was set up in 2009 as an industry-led, not-for-profit partnership between livestock producers, processors, animal health advisors and Government, Prof Brownlie argued for a similar body called "Cattle Health England".

Speaking on BVD, he said: "What do we need to do [to have a] national programme? We need leadership, we need a structure, there's no doubt we need a legal framework. We need a database that could capture the data and then process it – and we

report by
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need financial sustainability. "[Cattle Health England's] remit would just be what the Irish have got – looking at endemic disease.

"It should be an industry/Government partnership, [which] will be the main funders, and here we've got Defra, DairyCo, EBLEX, NFU, BCVA [and] food industry members."

Paradigm

He cautioned the organisation would need to be "at arm's length and independent of the funders", and would need a high level scientific advisory board. He estimated £10m would be enough to get the organisation going properly.

He said such an organisation would be looking at other endemic diseases, as well as BVD, affecting the national herd.

"Its first role would be to lead on the eradication of BVD – I would say that, but I think the

eradication of BVD, in a way, is a paradigm of how we could all work together," he said. "We know we can do it – other countries have done it, we know we've got to do it. If we can get that to work it could be that we make use of the same organisations to tackle other diseases. It could be a very exciting proposal.

"We've spent long enough talking about it, what we need is something that gives us executive function – makes it actually work."

Prof Brownlie said the organisation's infrastructure would have to be supported by industry, including those working in food, and "long-term commitment from Government" as well as veterinary leadership.

In reaction, Jonathan Statham, past-president of the BCVA and a cattle practitioner in Yorkshire, said Government would only lend its support – including any legislative frameworks required to control disease – if industry backed it first.

Mr Statham said: "Obviously, we don't have legislation in England at the moment, and certainly, the discussions the BCVA has had with Government means we need to show coordinated national

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Joe Brownlie.



industry support for a campaign before we will get support for legislation.

"Every time we get involved and we sign up to something, it will help put pressure on Government to help us," he said.

Prof Brownlie agreed with Mr Statham and reiterated countries that had managed to control endemic disease – including Ireland – had done so because a legal framework was in place.

Long way

James Russell, a practitioner based in Derbyshire, also agreed with Mr Statham about pressuring Government to encourage more legislation.

However, he thought such a resolution was distant. He said: "As somebody who sat on the surveillance 2014 board [a Government project that aims to detect new or re-emerging threats or changes in the occurrence of animal disease] earlier

this year, the ears were very firmly closed to any suggestions of endemic disease control. We've got a long way to go there I think," he said.

John Blackwell, BVA president elect, said: "BVA has fully supported BCVA's concept for a not-for-profit industry body for animal health and we made representations to Defra in our joint BVA/BCVA response to the bTB eradication strategy.

"Key drivers for the implementation of such a body include the acknowledged need for a national database, the implementation of enhanced bTB risk mitigation measures through risk-based trading, and the need for coordinated delivery of other endemic disease control programmes – specifically, BVD.

"We have seen how well the concept has worked in the Republic of Ireland and have supported the creation of a similar body in Northern Ireland."

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