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### **A new solution to an old problem**

Chris Just from the specialist farm animal veterinary practice Westpoint Vet Group Southwest takes a look at solving an old problem with new technology.

One novel idea that caught my imagination towards the end of 2009 was the launch of the BVD screening service from ear tissue taken while tagging calves. This offers great labour and cost saving opportunities and is fantastic from a welfare perspective. It has been applied in the US and New Zealand for some time and is now available in the UK. Ear tissue is not suitable for many disease tests (as either the technology isn't available yet or the tissue is not useful because of the way the disease 'works') but it is ideal for BVD screening.

BVD will by now be a familiar term to most cattle farmers (it only affects cows) and it is known to be present on 95% of dairy farms that test for it. The disease is caused by a virus and can result in a multitude of problems; from scouring and a fever to suppressing immunity and causing abortions and infertility.

The unusual thing about this virus is that if an animal becomes infected in early-mid pregnancy, her calf can become infected before its immune system can recognise the virus as being 'foreign'. The resulting calves therefore remain infected for life (known as persistently infected or 'PI') and shed huge quantities of the virus in their dung and urine, and from their noses. High levels of the virus in the environment can overcome immunity, even in animals that have been vaccinated, so it is critical to remove them at an early stage. This is where ear tissue testing comes in.

A plug of ear tissue is removed during the tagging process and automatically caught and sealed in a labelled pot, and posted direct to the lab. The BVD carrier status of the calf should be known within a week of birth, thus aiding management decisions. The process costs no more than £8 per animal for the tag and test, and tags printed with your unique animal ID passport number are available.

As a tool for reducing or eradicating BVD in problem herds, this technique is going to prove invaluable as a cheaper and therefore more profitable tool for farmers. Westpoint Vet Group is looking forward to delivering these benefits to its clients in 2010.