

Bluetongue Update

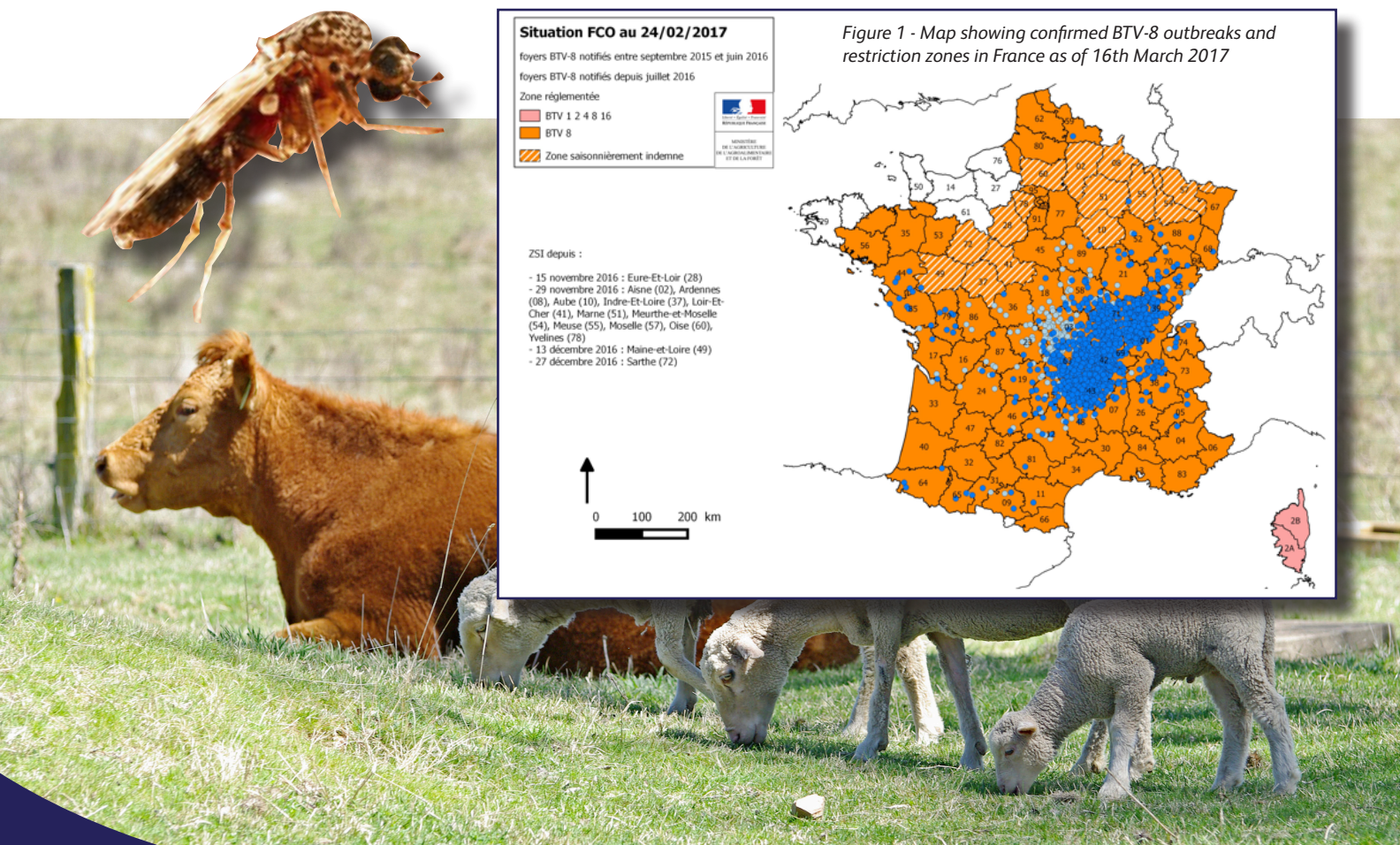
In 2016 saw the re-emergence of BTV-8 in France, the virus being the same as the one involved in the 2008-2009 outbreak of bluetongue. France continued to see new cases throughout 2016 and into 2017, reporting 406 new cases in December 2016, and 154 in January 2017. These cases have been detected mainly as a result of pre-movement testing, however they highlight the fact that disease is widespread in France and as we move into spring and temperatures rise, midge activity will increase as will the ability of the virus to replicate, further increasing the risk of disease transmission.

The assessment of risk to the UK is largely based on the disease situation in France, and meteorological predictions, which provide some indication of the likelihood of infected midges (which can travel up to 250km over water) being able to get to the UK shores. Whilst weather conditions and low average daily temperatures mean APHA (The Animal and Plant Health Agency) currently predict the risk of a disease incursion into the UK as 'low', this is likely to change as we move into spring. The movement restriction zones in France continue to extend and now reach the North coast, as can be seen from the solid orange areas on the map below published on the French ministry website on the 16th March 2017.

Bluetongue can cause both reproductive and production losses (milk drop, reduced meat and wool production) but being a notifiable disease the greatest impact is likely to come from the movement restrictions put in place if bluetongue is identified. Zones of 150km are immediately put in place around infected premises, which can have a significant impact on the ability to move and trade animals. The EU Bluetongue directive is in

place to ensure trade is able to continue in the event of an outbreak, and vaccination plays a key role in the strategy to allow animal movements and free trade to continue.

Protection against bluetongue is through keeping susceptible animals away from the vector (the midge) and vaccination. Pour-on insecticides are helpful in reducing the risk but vaccination is the only sure way to protect animals against infection. There have been no restrictions on use of Bluetongue vaccine since 2012 meaning farmers can choose to vaccinate at any time. Whilst disease did not enter the UK in 2016, the situation in France tells us that the risk remains for 2017. Vaccinating in spring will ensure animals are protected ahead of the active midge season, and vaccinating pre-turnout will improve convenience for many farmers. It's important to remember that for both cattle and sheep vaccination takes just over 6 weeks from starting the 2 dose vaccine course to the animal being protected.



Call us for more information

Routine opening hours
Mon - Fri 8.30am - 6.00pm
Sat 8.30am - 12.00 noon

24hr Emergency Services
Tel: 01746 713 911



Bull Fertility Testing



Calving is now well underway and while it may seem early to be thinking about the next production cycle it will soon be time for bulls to go back in with the herd and get to work again.

Preparing the cows for this period is crucial but it can sometimes be easy to forget about the other half of the equation – the breeding bull is also a key component of overall herd fertility. Studies have consistently shown that 20-25 % of bulls are sub-fertile, and while a sub-fertile bull may still be able to get some cows in calf a fully fertile bull will on average achieve a 9 % higher in-calf rate.

You do not need to wait until scanning or even calving time to find out if your bull has done his job properly – we are able to carry out breeding soundness examinations on farm prior to use. All we need is a suitable, safe crush that allows access at the back and side, a power point and a table that is reasonably sheltered.



These exams consist of:

- A clinical exam checking body condition, the eyes, teeth and mobility/feet
- Assessment of testicle size (yes it really does matter) and ruling out any gross abnormalities
- Assessment of the internal sex glands and penis/prepuce
- Analysis of a semen sample – this is collected by inserting a probe into the rectum and applying a voltage (this may make your eyes water but causes minimal discomfort)
 - We look at sperm count, motion and morphology to assess whether a sample is satisfactory

While this examination is not an absolute guarantee it will detect most problems and give you time to correct them and limit any losses. Other instances where you may consider a fertility exam are before purchasing or hiring a new bull, prior to sale, or if you have specific concerns at any point that bull may not be fertile. If you want to find out more then please contact the surgery for a chat with one of our vets.

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