Trio of new NMR services set to bo ost herd health and performance

New ‘checkups’ to impro ve health and longevity

Health and longevity are the core of NMR’s new services launched this autumn. Producers who take advantage of these should see a positive contribution to herd performance. Included is the industry’s first integrated tag and disease test service.

text **Karen Wright**

The ability to tag a calf at three days old and simultaneously take a tissue sample for Bovine Viral Diarrhoea Virus (BVD) testing will make significant headway into controlling one of the most important pathogenic viruses in cattle, according to NMR’s development manager Hannah Pearse.

“BVD costs our cattle industry between £25 and £61 million a year according to studies by the University of Reading,” says Ms Pearse. “And despite 50 years of vaccines and other tools to help control BVD, the prevalence of the disease is just as great. Vaccines alone do not control BVD and more tools are needed.”

To this end NMR has pooled the resources of two of its companies – ear-tag supplier Nordic Star and NML, which carries out disease testing, and developed the ‘Tag and Test’ service.

Tag and Test will identify persistently infected (PI) animals at the earliest stage. These animals are infected before birth by their mother and, if they survive, they are infectious for the rest of their lives. Left in the herd, they will shed huge quantities of the virus and transmit the disease when they come into contact with other animals.

“It is a very integrated and simple service. Farmers – dairy or beef – order supplies of tags from Nordic Star. They apply the tags as normal but the ear tissue sample is collected in a bar-coded vial attached to the tag applicators. This is posted to the NML laboratory and the BVD test is carried out.”

Full traceability

The service gives accurate and reliable results at the earliest opportunity. “There is also full traceability through the bar-coded tag and vial and results can be back with the vet or on farm – or both as requested – within five days of the tissue arriving at the lab. Should the result be positive, the animal can be removed. And this prevents the risk of transmission to other animals, as well as eliminating the rearing costs of an infected animal.”

Tag and Test will cost between £7 and £8 plus VAT, depending on quantities ordered. This includes the tag, vial and BVD antigen test.

Looking ahead, NMR hopes that the Tag and Test service will open up more possibilities for carrying out tests for other diseases or for genomic or DNA testing.

Tissue collection vial and ear tag

Swiss experience

By October 2009 the majority of farms in Switzerland will be free from BVD thanks to a national eradication programme.

A major part of this programme has been the detection and elimination of all newborn PI calves using ear-notch samples.

“The Swiss government estimated that BVD was costing its industry around £5m a year,” says Christoph Egli from Idexx Laboratories, who has been involved in the programme through its ear notch testing services. “Using the ear-notch samples has been fundamental to the country’s success in removing PI calves and this will continue to be carried out for at least the next 12 months and certainly until the Government can be sure the disease is completely eradicated.”

All test results are recorded on a national database and calf movement is prohibited until a negative result is entered. |

Going live

The new NMR services will be demonstrated at the Dairy Event and Livestock Show on September 16 and 17, Stoneleigh, and at the Dairy Show, Shepton Mallet on October 7.

Alternatively call NMR Customer Services on 0844 7255567 or look at:
costumerservices@nmr.co.uk.

Free access to Lifetime Daily Yields

The Lifetime Daily Yield (LDY) of a cow is the amount of milk she has given for each day of her life. Calving at two years old, good yields and getting back in calf without delays will give a good LDY. This measure is increasingly being used as a reflection of good health, fertility and longevity.

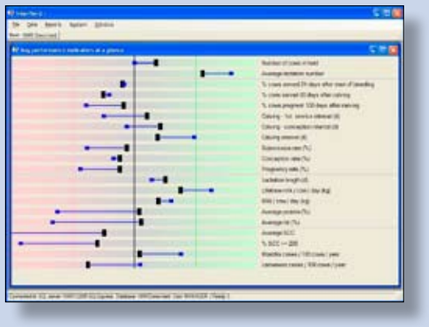
As of this autumn, producers can access current LDY data for each cow and for the herd after each recording via the Herd Companion web site in the Lifetime Yield Monitor section. This is free for all NMR customers.

“We want to encourage producers to use this information to identify the contribution made by each cow and the trends,” says NMR’s business development manager Ben Bartlett. “The data uses NMR information for age at first calving, calving interval, culling rates and milk yields.”

This figure shows the improvements made in one herd from June 2008 to June 2009 for cows by lactation – one of the graphs included in Lifetime Yield Monitor. Producers visiting the NMR stand at the Dairy Event can find out their current LDYs from the new Lifetime Yield Monitor and see how they rank compared with the NMR average.

Screen with a view pinpoints highs and lows

NMR, in conjunction with Reading University-based PAN Livestock, is introducing InterHerd Plus this autumn.



Currently being tested by vet practices, it brings accurate herd and cow predictions based on current performance. “This means that problems are highlighted quickly,” says NMR developer Seamus Gilheany. “There’s no need to dig deep into the data – problems should be very obvious.”

And this is a feature already appealing to vets who are looking forward to in-depth analyses without hours of legwork. From a new ‘front page’ trends in performance are easily spotted, as shown in the figure, and simply clicking on the bar will immediately take users into the necessary data behind the particular trend.

All InterHerd users will receive InterHerd Plus free of charge. Prices for both systems are available directly from NMR.

Average herd performance for key parameters. Front screen showing average herd performance now (black dot) and three months ago (blue dot). All parameters can be customised but movement into the red area signifies worsening performance and into the green area is an improvement in performance. Producers can ‘click’ on any of the dots to get the information that lies behind these averages