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Bid to beat parasite that hits dairy cattle

SCIENTISTS WILL participate in new research aimed at identifying a way for farmers to combat a parasite that can cause stunted growth and early mortality in dairy cattle.

The animal disease Cryptosporidiosis – which can also pose a threat to human health – occurs when young cattle get infected by parasites and can spread quickly across herds.

Now a team at Kent University's School of Biosciences, working with other universities and organisations across Europe, including the National Farmers' Union in the UK, will lead a three-part study, known as H4DC, which has been awarded £3.2m in European funding.

Researchers will work with the NFU and other local and European farming organisations to gauge the extent of the problem and identify its economic impact on the dairy cattle industry. Pilot farms will be established with a target of halving the number of contaminated cattle through the use of a new detection kit being developed at Kent as part of the project.

Dr Anastasios Tsaousis, Senior Lecturer in Molecular Parasitology and lead scientist of this project at Kent's School of Biosciences, said: "Cattle farmers across Europe are badly affected by Cryptosporidium infection, so this research could have a major impact in reducing its serious economic impact. And, by reducing the occurrence of this disease, we will also help reduce the potential threat to human health."

The project also involves the University of East Anglia, plus two French universities as well as farmers' associations in Belgium and Holland.