



Over the Counter December / January

### Working together brings benefits to all

*The Defra paper 'Unlocking Potential – a report on veterinary expertise in food animal production' by Professor Lowe that was published this summer examining farmer attitudes to the use of medicines and health planning on their farm. Some of it was good and showed how far as an industry we have come, however in many areas, Professor Lowe felt the industry could do more , writes vet Matt Dobbs of Westpoint Veterinary Group.*

Healthy farm animals means profitable enterprises and, ultimately, business for us – vets and the animal health trade. Farm Health Planning is one of the best ways of ensuring this occurs and is a great way of establishing that there is a constant dialogue with the farmer. Of course, on a dairy herd much of this will focus on mastitis and fertility and be very vet-focussed, but herd (or flock) health plans can work extremely well for the trade too, and both vets and suppliers should work together. For example, there are opportunities to discuss options for endo- and ecto-parasites, fly and midge control as well as clostridial disease and pasteurilla for sheep. However, much of the time, a general chat will reveal underlying issues. Perhaps lamb survival has fallen, maybe there is an increased lameness issue or calves are failing to thrive– steering the farmer to take proper advice from either SQP or vet is a good starting place, and encouraging a planned approach to health planning a logical next step.

Alarmingly, the Lowe report included the following table:

#### Farm health planning uptake by farm type in England

	Dairy	Beef	Sheep	Pigs
% Farm Health Plan in place	83%	42%	56%	50%
% Farm Health Plan in larger enterprise	92%	53%	65%	73%

What does this tell us? Firstly that there is a huge opportunity to increase the uptake of health planning and seek out instances where vets and SQPs can support the health and welfare needs of farms in the area. By working together through health planning, vets can provide the diagnosis and then in conjunction with the SQP provide the most cost effective treatment solution. SQPs can direct farmers to vets where they can be confident the vet can help identify the problem, or the SQP could direct the client to a vet or vet pharmacy where they can fulfil a prescription where a prescribed medicine is required. In return the vet can build a relationship with a local SQP, confident that the client will be getting the correct advice and most cost effective solution.

An initiative that is being launched in the south east of England is a good example of where a range of different interested parties can work together to improve disease control. LASER, or Livestock Assurance South East Region, will apply to all cattle producers in the area defined as the south east by the Rural Development Agency. Organisations such as the NFU, EBLEX, Animal Health and Welfare Group, NMR and Westpoint Vet Group have developed a scheme which awards a 'status' for four endemic and significant diseases. The diseases being monitored are Bovine Viral Diarrhoea, Infectious Bovine Rhinotracheitis, Leptospirosis and Johne's Disease and herds are defined as being bronze, silver, gold or platinum depending on screening, vaccination and bio-security. Over time new diseases will be added, and the scheme may develop to cover some key sheep diseases.

This is just one example of cross channel success that will improve health and welfare and could perhaps get SQPs and vets to consider other options for working alongside each other as effectively as possible.