

Cattle medicine: past present and future...

THE opening paper at the BCVA congress in October was presented by Roger Blowey, who addressed the topic of "Progress in practice – have we learnt any lessons?"

Reviewing his experiences since qualifying in 1968, he recalled that veterinary work was chiefly clinical calls to individual animals. These cases were considered to be urgent by the client so there was pressure to get to the cases at the right time, with many calls at night and at weekends.

Client recording systems for metabolic profiles, mastitis and fertility were developed, in collaboration with researchers, within his Gloucester practice and the data used at farmer meetings. Successful state eradication programmes have been introduced for Brucellosis, warble fly, Enzootic Bovine Leucosis, anthrax and Bovine Spongiform Encephalitis but not TB.

In the early days a TB reactor was a topic for discussion within the practice whereas now farms without a reactor are a talking point.

An in-depth review of the problems with TB and other issues are contained within the proceedings but it is thoughts for the future that were highlighted within the presentation.

Diagnosis and treatment are increasingly being carried out successfully by farmer clients and the speaker indicated that it would be wrong of the profession to try and stop this movement away from exclusively veterinary application. The downside is that there are fewer opportunities for recent graduates to gain clinical experience.

The pharmaceutical industry has been a great source of innovation, information and training and vets have a moral responsibility to support those products that have been backed up by extensive research, he said. New diseases have been tackled but lessons need to be learned about prevention.

Digital dermatitis now is involved in over one third of lameness cases but little was done to prevent the disease spreading from Europe to the UK.

New technologies will change the form of veterinary activity with an increasingly advisory capacity anticipated. The greatest lesson learnt by the speaker is to go with change and not try to prevent it. Learning from farmer clients about their business enables the vet to become a source of training and information.

Indicating that he is in the present and not looking backwards, the opportunity was taken to disagree with

the latest BCVA newsletter content on calf feeding and to take *Veterinary Practice* to task for highlighting the low expectations from the badger shooting operations. The speaker may have retired from practice but continues to observe veterinary affairs with interest.

Food security

Professor Tim Benton of the University of Leeds advises on global food security and offered a challenging interpretation

RICHARD GARD
continues his reports from the BCVA congress held in Harrogate in October

of international data. Higher temperatures in the UK and some parts of the world are expected to exceed the physiological tolerance of plants so that plant growth, pollination, etc., will not take place.

Countries like Asia are becoming wealthier and an increasing demand for food can be expected. Sustainable food supply will become increasingly important and meat is what the consumers want. Livestock production with a low carbon footprint is the way forward, he said.

The more food produced means more food eaten, more food waste and more health issues. Over-eating and food waste have to be managed better. Emphasis needs to be on healthy eating with dietary changes offering a reduction in carbon usage rather than an increase in production.

There is expected to be a greater role for mixed farming with lower volumes of quality food produced to the highest standards. Good animal welfare utilising mixed systems with grass fed animals would increase exports of quality produce. Detailed information is available at www.foodsecurity.ac.uk.

Four programmes

The congress operated four parallel programmes over three days so it was necessary to pick a session from fertility, topical issues, parasites, herd health, nutrition, mastitis, calf health, infectious disease or lameness.

There was also a session for students and 12 postgraduate presentations of project work. These presentations covered a variety of topics but all appeared to question what is being done now and how matters might be improved.

Katherine Adam of the RVC carried out a survey to establish what vets really do and to indicate what affects the work



Paul Burr (left) with Rennie Gresham of Hipra, Peter Orpin, Laura Valls and Dr Jet Mars.

that vets do. The responses from 375 individuals referred to farm animal work. The conclusions were that more veterinary work involves reactive services than routine or advisory work.

Routine and advisory work is associated with farm-only vets, larger practices, and higher levels of job satisfaction. Individual ambition to remain in farm animal practice is relevant but the major question is: what are the barriers to providing advisory services? Is there a divide within the profession between those who actively engage in advisory roles and those who engage in reactive work such as obstetrics and sick animals?

Despite the general thrust of various speakers, that consultancy and advisory is the way forward for the profession, it appears that there is currently more veterinary time in practice involved with a direct clinical role. Veterinary educators will need to recognise the blend of skills now required in modern farm practice.

IBR in Holland

One of the sessions on infectious bovine rhinotracheitis highlighted the experiences from the Netherlands and the development of practice-based disease control. Dr Jet Mars explained that following extensive testing in 1998, 84% of herds in the Netherlands were found to be sero-positive and there was great interest in a national control programme.

Unfortunately, contamination of the vaccine with BVDv meant that the farmers stopped vaccinating and confidence in the vaccine has yet to return. Currently only 30% of herds are vaccinated.

The aim is to carry out risk-based monitoring and detect outbreaks before they spread, utilising monthly bulk tank testing, nasal swabs of clinical cases and blood samples from abortions. For the future, the farmers will need to want to eradicate the disease with possibly compulsory culling of IBR positive animals and vaccinate the whole herd forever until the herd is disease free. Young-stock need to be vaccinated before exposure.

Laura Valls of Hipra explained the laboratory processes involved to concentrate IgG and

enhance the detection of sero-positive animals. Monthly milk samples sent to a central lab detect a herd sero-prevalence from 4%.

The practical application of utilising the Seromilk marker detection approach to develop active disease control was described by Peter Orpin. A typical farmer to vet response is "IBR sero-positive – so what". The results from the lab show past results and current readings so that the farmer and vet can see how control is developing. The aim is to get ahead of the spread of infection within the herd with a vaccination programme specific to the herd management.

Within the practice, Myhealthyherd bio-security risk assessments were completed for all herds, not just those with a known IBR history. Bulk milk samples are sent to Hipra for analysis and the results, recorded within MHH categories of herds according to risks and vaccination status, embedded in the health plan. Farmer engagement is essential.

Peter concluded that for the vet it is important to accept that we can do a better job with IBR and move from "jab and go" vetting to more strategic control. Within the practice develop a database of information, supported by a "champion" vet to deal with infectious diseases more consistently.

A workshop on the use of new solutions to enhance bovine TB testing concluded that negative cattle to the skin test could be blood sampled 15 days later and tested with Idexx ELISA to improve the detection of positives (further information at idexx.com/mbovis). ELISA alone would be valuable for use in camelids. With PCR a positive result indicates infection; a negative finding means nothing.

■ Copies of the proceedings are available via www.bcva.org.uk.



Professor Tim Benton with Jonathan Statham (the then BCVA president) and Roger Blowey.