

# Sustainable growth, tagging and farm skills in focus

THE Livestock Event 2014 was opened by George Eustice, the parliamentary under-secretary for DEFRA, who launched a "sustainable growth plan" for the British dairy industry.

Rob Harrison, farmer and chairman of the Dairy Roadmap and NFU Dairy Board, encouraged everyone connected with the industry to read the document entitled *Leading the Way*.

A major aim is to eliminate the trade deficit by producing four billion extra litres of milk and increasing the national herd by half a million cows. Currently there are some 14,000 dairy farmers and 1.8 million cows. According to the plan, any dairy system, of any size, run well, can be profitable and sustainable and growth is targeted to include small, medium and large herds.

The Minister was questioned about progress with bovine TB and indicated that although licences were originally issued for four years, a new detailed licence was required for culling in Somerset and Gloucester and the programme will probably recommence in August/September for a six-week period.

The independent expert panel would not be reconvened and the same level of monitoring by Natural England and the AHVLA would not be incorporated. Last year post mortem examinations were carried out on 150 badgers and this would not be repeated. It was not clear whether farmers who signed up for the four-year licence would automatically be included within any new licence.

Also launched at the event was the second report of the GB Cattle Health & Welfare Group. The report is available to download from [www.chawg.org.uk](http://www.chawg.org.uk).

This group now encompasses England, Wales and Scotland and Tim Brigstocke, the chairman, commented that bovine TB is not reported on

**RICHARD GARD** reports on the Livestock Event held at the NEC last month, at which DEFRA launched a new plan for the British dairy industry



by CHAWG as the disease is being assessed by other groups.

Greater collaboration is being sought on industry welfare-related activities to ensure progress and to identify priority areas and CHAWG supports the concept of Animal Health GB and the delivery of hard evidence for the success or failure of welfare initiatives.

Robust surveillance and monitoring is considered essential following the re-arrangements within the AHVLA, together with health data at the point of sale of cattle to inform risk-based trading. Considerable information and data of interest are contained within the report.

One of the points brought up during the Health Planning Seminars at the event was the difficulty of managing the on-farm team to recognise and prevent disease, which may undermine the accuracy of collected data.

## Life after quotas

The business debates included a presentation and discussion about life for UK dairy farmers after quotas. The last time that the UK made quota was in 2003 but some EU countries have had their production limited due to quota restrictions. These countries are expected to increase production and look to increase exports to the UK.

The more favourable profitability with UK milk, however, leads the industry to see an opportunity now with increased quality production.

DairyCo produces monthly analysis of the facts and figures. The UK costs of production are equivalent to Ireland, Germany, the US and higher than New Zealand. An annual survey of 1,000 farmers has indicated an increasing confidence in

milk production. Milk buyers will be sourcing supplies that match their market requirements. Monthly information by e-mail to practices is available from [datum.info@dairyco.org.uk](mailto:datum.info@dairyco.org.uk).

## BVD tagging scheme

It is early days but XLVets is inviting its own member and other practices to consider the value of the CHECK TAG BVD scheme. Stuart Gough, of the Calveton Veterinary Group in Cornwall, provided an online demonstration of the database.

The proposals are that calves negative to testing of the ear notch have a white tag.

The record of the test for these animals can be viewed online by anyone at [bvdcheck.co.uk](http://bvdcheck.co.uk) using a mobile or computer. The scheme is voluntary for farmers wanting to identify and remove PIs from the herd.

As more veterinary practices recommend the scheme, so the volume of white tag calves is expected to increase. The tags are available from several suppliers and information is available from [joanne.sharpe@xlvets.co.uk](mailto:joanne.sharpe@xlvets.co.uk).

Stuart mentioned that the BVD tags could become part of pre-movement testing for bovine TB. As his practice is in a poor bTB area, this is a low-cost way of adding value for the farmer with the BVD result available when the skin test is read on the farm.

NMR has launched the BVD HerdCheck scheme involving quarterly milk tests, antibody ELISA and PCR virus, from samples already collected and stored, at a cost of £175 per herd per year.

## Farm Skills programme

The XLVets stand appears to be a permanent feature at the Livestock Event and the green T-shirts are much sought after with the green buckets seen being carried about the show. There was a competition for photographs of unusual usage of a bucket and this can still be entered via [farmskills@xlvets.co.uk](mailto:farmskills@xlvets.co.uk).

The Farm Skills programme of training



Students Emma Stuart and Susan Carr with their awards received from John Sumner.

is well established and added to this is Farm Fortress. The aim is for farmers to develop a risk-based management system to prevent infectious diseases being introduced and spreading through a herd or flock. This topic has been presented before by vets at many shows and identifying the specific risks for any one farm would appear to be a strong combination of veterinary and farmer knowledge. Any one of the 10 risk areas highlighted is a major topic in its own right but vaccination failure seems to crop up time and time again.

Farmers may have great difficulty with some of the risk areas, such as boundaries, watercourses and slurry, but vets and contractors bringing in disease appear to be easier to tackle. Assessing effectiveness of the Fortress scheme within veterinary practices may support the future requirements identified by CHAWG.

## Health management awards

It was the seventh year of the Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers' Farm Health Management Awards for veterinary and agricultural students. Susan Carr (RVC) won the veterinary category with Emma Stuart (of the Royal Dick) runner-up. Rebecca Hodgson (Myerscough) received the winner's £500 cheque for the agricultural section and Victoria Read (Plumpton) the certificate.

John Sumner (award chairman) commented on the high standard of the essays that exhibited exceptionally good research and structure and an

impressive analytical approach. John Reynolds on behalf of the sponsor, Volac, commended the finalists for their awareness in adopting a proactive approach to farm health.

The remit for the 1,500-word essays includes the financial impact of disease,

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Peter Plate, Stuart Gough and Helen Miles on the XLVets stand with the green buckets.