

Snails a hot topic at the livestock show

AT first glance it may seem strange to talk about mud snails at the national Dairy Event and Livestock Show, but 2012 has been such an unusual summer season that the role of snails with cattle is a hot topic.

The show was opened by the then Farming Minister, Jim Paice, who appeared relaxed as he answered questions from the press. Earlier, the departure of Caroline Spellman had been announced and questions along the lines of "What qualities are required for the head of DEFRA" were capably deflected with good humour.

A couple of hours later he too was replaced but by then he had confirmed that further regulation on antibiotics by Europe was not anticipated. One year ago the use of antibiotics was an alarming topic but it seems to have slipped down the activity agenda.

As for the snails, they are expected to be thriving in the wet weather and their role with the success of the liver fluke is pointing to increasing levels of anaemia and liver damage from the hungry larvae. More snails, more risk of reduced milk production for dairy cows and poor weight gain for sucklers.

The role of ducks, at-risk pastures, leaky water troughs and cattle treatments, targeted at early and late stage larvae and adults and influenced by the season, were highlighted, together with the appliance of science, including blood chemistry.

The amount of liver damage determines the recovery from treatment but there was some consolation that "livers heal well". Keith Cutler supported the discussion with case histories of herds where the wrong treatment had been applied for the circumstances with inadequate results.

Confident message

The message came across that vets may seem to be expensive but when disease is not properly understood the outcome can be very expensive indeed. It was a strong message delivered with confidence.

The enthusiastic

XL Vets Group were displaying their bright green T shirts on the Farm Skills stand with vets helping people to develop basic skills. Milk sampling technique, utilising a rubber-teated udder, appeared to be attracting considerable attention and not a little laughter. It seems to be a feature of their approach that enjoyment of tasks well done, no matter how apparently

RICHARD GARD reports on the year's major livestock event held at the NEC last month, highlighting the strong involvement of the veterinary profession in both the sessions and the exhibition



basic, is actively encouraged.

A full programme of over 80 workshops to the end of the year in Northern England, Midlands and Wales and Southern England were publicised, including the safe use of veterinary medicines, respiratory disease, lameness, mastitis, lambing, parasite control, animal first aid for smallholders, bull fertility, DIY AI, foot trimming and other topics requested by the farmers.

The autumn edition of *Livestock Matters* highlights liver fluke with an overview by Neil Laing from the Clyde Veterinary Group. An outsized depiction of an orange mud snail is clearly displayed. Everyone involved seems pleased with the development of the Farm Skills programme and it is hoped that the financial aspects are met in the future so that further developments are able to proceed.

Showpiece

The event is a showpiece for the Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers and Boehringer Ingelheim sponsored the Farm Health Planning Awards.

Essays submitted by students at agricultural colleges and veterinary schools "demonstrate their understanding of proactive farm health management and how it brings benefits to animal health and welfare and business profitability".

Diane Jane Gornall from Lancashire studying at Myerscough and Emily Gascoigne from Dorset studying at the Cambridge veterinary school were the deserved winners. Copies of the essays are available from Allan Henderson of Boehringer and they make interesting reading.

Emily noted that "the breadth and

analytical nature of the veterinary degree enables vets to critically analyse and utilise research to devise informed preventative, control and production strategies". Furthermore: "Evidence-based medicine promotes correct quantification of diseases such as lameness and infection and enables prioritisation of directives and targeting of resources to achieve the greatest impact on animal health, welfare and profitability."

However, this is no rose-tinted-glasses assessment and failures of the application of Farm Health Planning and the lack of communication by vets (too much talk, not enough listening) are reviewed.

It may be worth considering the following point: "The farm vet of the future is one who is inspired by the expansion of the paraprofessional and independent consultant industries and positions their business accordingly."

'Vets are expensive'

Diane reviewed the management actions to be taken when disease and other issues have been identified. Accepting that "vets are expensive", she concluded that "working with professionals such as vets and nutritionists, farmers can work out a feasible, sustainable and profitable health management plan".

The issue of communication is also highlighted but with a slightly different emphasis: "It is important to communicate with employees to ensure that they understand and are capable of carrying out methods and routines of the plan."

The collaboration between veterinary surgeons and nutritionists to maximise herd profitability is a business theme that is being developed in relation to the transition cow. There were three seminars each day on this topic arranged by Elanco.

Dr Finbar Mulligan discussed strategies: "We recommend body condition scoring and recording: at drying-off, at calving, at pre-breeding exams, at time of AI or breeding, at least three times after cows are milking for 150 days.

"We have found that the first few cows scored on any one day are the most important and that a BCS descriptor chart should always be at hand at this time.

"Body condition scoring is something we feel the farmer should do,



but that the veterinarian should encourage, ensure the farmer is accurate at and inspect some of the close-up and far-off dry cows on problem farms as a matter of routine."

The Farm Health Planning Seminars are an established item for this event and they attract a

good attendance for each of the topics. This year many of the sessions involved a vet and a farmer so that the outcomes could be discussed as well as the ambition.

Feed forum

There were also vets involved in the Feed Science Forums with specialists from nutritional product companies sharing the platform to discuss fertility and metabolic disease in cattle and trace elements with sheep.

It was interesting to visit the machinery and general farm services and products displays. The themes of "healthy cows are happy cows" and "healthy cows are productive cows" have been taken up by many of the suppliers from buckets and brushes to new milking parlours and equipment. Products that are promoted to keep cows disease-free are widespread and for many there is no indication that disease is linked to veterinary involvement.

The first annual report of the GB Cattle Health & Welfare Group (see the following story) was launched by Tim Brigstocke, supported by Carl Padgett, Christianne Glossop and farmer Derek Davis.

The content is seen as very important to guide the future provision of veterinary services and to provide an evidence base to aid planning at national and farm level.

There are 14 conclusions, which highlight issues. The report states that until these issues are resolved, the industry will struggle to confidently quantify both levels of challenge and improvements in performance.

Copies of the report can be downloaded from www.chawg.org.uk.



Dr Finbar Mulligan.



Taking the farm skills challenge at the event.