At the beginning of the year we were informed that one of our farmers had been advised to stop vaccinating for BVD as it was a ‘cost to his business’. Eight months down the line, and 5 persistently infected BVD animals requiring euthanasia, later, it would appear this was not the best advice our customer could have paid for.

Too often our farmers are advised to cut the wrong areas of spend. With increasing pressure on antibiotic usage in the industry, vet spend analysis will become an increasingly useful tool to not only scrutinise your health and productivity costs, but also design cost-beneficial treatment protocols to ensure animals return to production quickly within the constraints of your contract, and your bottom line is optimised.

Using our example above, when BVD took a hold on the farm, youngstock health declined rapidly. BVD virus causes enormous immune suppression, and therefore allows other disease-causing bacteria and viruses a greater chance of causing illness. In addition to the 5 persistently infected animals that required euthanasia, unlike previous years, there were 6 bottles of Draxxin and 2 bottles of Metacam required to fight the outbreak of pneumonia within the youngstock. Not only did the antibiotic spend on farm increase dramatically, but the production losses and likely increased age at first calving, will be the greatest cost to the business. The knock-on effects of a single business decision based upon perceived ‘cost’ can be long-lasting and extremely damaging to profitability. We urge all our farmers to engage in proactive analysis of the annual vet spend and understand where you are investing, and where you are ‘firefighting’, to assist educated business decisions to help drive the efficiencies you require.

At Willows, we have tools available to separate your vet spend into different categories of products and services, and also further categorisation of both preventative, and reactive, costs for your business. Following our BVD example, should a decision be reached that based on a risk assessment of your herd, a strategic vaccination programme against BVD, of the correct animals, at the correct time, is an important preventative investment for your business, then before this prescriptive advice from your vet is removed, we should discuss the potential outcomes of such a decision.

Some advisors are offering advice on health, productivity and welfare without fully understanding the potential impacts of their decisions.

We would encourage all our farming businesses to engage with their regular vet and annually appraise their veterinary spend. We will facilitate constructive appraisal of both the preventative investments you make, as well as the reactive therapeutic spend. Tracking your rolling annual spend will allow target setting for reduction of spend in the correct areas, with step-by-step action plans generated from our advice to help you achieve this.

It is important that the correct areas of vet spend are reduced. Our general principle is to increase the preventative percentage of the business vet spend, and hopefully reduce your requirement for expensive ‘fire brigade’ work, thus lowering your overall spend. In order to achieve this efficiently, it is important to understand where the greatest proportion of your reactive spend is, to highlight the areas of greatest opportunity specific to your farm.

Vet Impress screenshots of product categorisation and breakdown to highlight areas of highest use. Examples of some of the simplest analyses available, on just one of the tools we have to allow Vet Spend Analysis.
Lungworm - how to spot the signs

Although turn-out may seem a long way off, especially considering how wet it is, it is worth planning your lungworm prevention now to ensure full protection is in place for your young-stock.

Lung-worms (Dictyocaulus viviparus), are present as larvae on pasture from spring onwards and may cause clinical signs of parasitic bronchitis (husk) from 2-3 weeks after exposure to significant pasture burden. Most disease occurs July - September but can be seen as late as November, a clinical picture we have seen in 2017. Young-stock are the most vulnerable during their first grazing season, a strong acquired immunity is usually protective in adult animals. Larvae are ingested during grazing and migrate through the intestinal wall to the lung tissue within 7 days.

These larvae develop into adult worms and establish themselves in the small airways of the lungs where they produce eggs containing immature larvae. These are coughed up and swallowed, passing out in the faeces and migrating over the pasture. Clinical signs consist of coughing and rapid respiratory rate. Severely affected animals may stand with head and neck extended, breathing through their mouth. The affected group will struggle with growth rates too.

The mainstay of prevention is vaccination with attenuated lungworm using the oral vaccine, Huskvac, which stimulates a strong immunity and helps prevent clinical disease. For best protection the vaccination course should be started at least 6 weeks prior to turnout in the first grazing season. The course is two doses separated by 4 weeks, with full immunity developing by two weeks post vaccination.

Focus Group Meetings

We’re very privileged in the veterinary profession that we are usually able to build strong, deep (and hopefully lasting!) relationships with our farmers. However, this isn’t perfect: firstly, as we get to know you better we can start to make assumptions about you, and your thoughts, without asking. And secondly, although we have lots of individual conversations with you, we rarely get the chance to put all this information together, and use your collective feedback to take things forwards.

One thing is for certain, we are absolutely convinced that the right thing for us as a business, as we change in response to the industry changing around us, is to keep our customers front and centre of everything we do.

For this reason, we are inviting interest from farmers to join a pool of people that we can call upon to run focus group meetings. The meetings will be run on an ad hoc basis, as and when we feel one is needed and we don’t envisage inviting everyone in the pool to every meeting - we will target invitations on the topic and relevance.

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If you would be interested in joining us occasionally to give us some honest, but constructive feedback on the things that we are doing currently, along with things that we might do in the future, then please talk to your vet about registering your interest. Many Thanks!

HAPPY NEW YEAR!
We hope you had a good Christmas and wish you all the best for a happy and successful new year.