Reports and Comments

Ruminant health and welfare survey

Ruminant Health and Welfare (RH&W) is an independent, industry-based body, set-up in 2020 to tackle disease in cattle, sheep and goats in the UK. The aims of RH&W are to:

i) Prevent, manage or eradicate those endemic diseases with the greatest effect on health, welfare and productivity;

ii) Identify opportunities for farm-level interventions that support our ambition of being among the world leaders in animal welfare;

(iii) Address inherent issues in current and future farming systems that could lead to health and welfare or reputational challenges; and

(iv) Champion high health and welfare standards, and priorities relating to domestic or overseas markets for the four nations.

RH&W functions as a committee within the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB, England) but, recognising that disease does not have geographical boundaries, also works collaboratively with Quality Meat Scotland (QMS), Hybu Cig Cymru/Meat Promotion Wales (HCC) and Northern Ireland's Livestock and Meat Commission.

One of the first tasks of RH&W was to conduct a 'grassroots' survey with the aim of "establishing the disease, health and welfare priorities of those who work with cattle and sheep on a daily basis." Six hundred and sixty-two responses were received from farmers and professionals working with cattle (73% beef, 27% dairy), and hill, upland and lowland sheep (17, 28 and 55%, respectively).

As well as considering diseases, respondents were also asked to respond on 'syndromes' – defined in the survey as "broader conditions caused by a range of potential factors and commonly associated with particular stages in the production cycle."

Opening the Report, Nigel Miller (RH&W chairman) notes that "Clearly disease is often the visible component of a syndrome with nutrition, environmental factors and genetics also involved at times. Moving health management to a whole system approach can open the door to more significant progress."

The top diseases and syndromes impacting ruminant production and welfare in the UK were found to be:

Animal	Disease	Syndromes
Sheep	Footrot	Reproductive failure
	Contagious Ovine Digital Dermatitis	Neonatal lamb disease or mortality
	Sheep scab	Anthelmintic resistance
	Liver fluke	Joint ill
	Fly strike	Mastitis
	Parasitic gastroenteritis	
Cattle	Digital dermatitis	Lameness
	Bovine Viral Diarrhoea	Reproductive failure
	Johne's disease	Neonatal or calf disease
	Liver fluke	Mastitis (sub-clinical and acute)
	Viral pneumonia (PI-3, RSV)	Bovine respiratory disease

RH&W plan to host at least one workshop during summer 2021 at which farmers, vets, researchers and industry organisations/stakeholders will be able to discuss the survey results. It is hoped that participants will be able to identify "…how the four nations can work together to deliver a new operating environment to deliver fresh and tangible progress against these (disease/syndrome) priorities. A range of possible interventions will be identified based on relevance, cost and likelihood of adoption."

Ruminant Health and Welfare: Cattle and Sheep Health and Welfare Priorities: A 'Grassroots' Survey across the Four Nations of the UK (May 2021). A4, 35 pages. Survey carried out by Ruminant Health and Welfare (RH&W). Analysis and report generated by Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) with additional commentary from RH&W. Available online at: www.ruminanthw.org.uk.

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