



## **Herd Health Planning**

**A look at the Value of Including the Vet  
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### **Herd health planning**

Some 700 vets from 260 practices have now completed the Level 1 CPD (Continued Professional Development) course in Herd Health Planning, reports the British Cattle Veterinary Association. Around 120 practices are now also using its new Herd Health Plan software, which cost over £20,000 to develop. This software enables vets to efficiently draw-up and maintain a comprehensive health plan that not only satisfies the requirements of the National Dairy Farm Assured Scheme, but also assists the farm in implementing money saving disease prevention practices.

Health Planning is an integral requirement of the NDFAS, and thus of the Little Red Tractor Quality Assurance kite mark scheme, which now adorns the labels of British produced milk, and which will be receiving additional promotional impetus in the coming months. By March, all milk destined for Red Tractor labelled bottles must be from a farm certified to NDFAS standards.

Currently there is no stipulation that health planning for NDFAS certification must be done with a vet, although most codes of practice recommend it. There are, however, distinct advantages to the farmer in involving their vet, says Devon vet Dick Sibley who sits on the NDFAS Board and who devised much of the health aspects of the NDFAS. These are:

#### **1) Improves Scheme credibility**

In order for Quality Assurance schemes to work they must have the full confidence of the general public and retailers. Health plans done with a vet are inherently more credible than those done without one – a factor that is particularly attractive to some milk purchasers.

#### **2) Saves money**

Health plans help to identify problem diseases, but only health plans done with a vet can provide veterinary solutions to the problems, he insists. For example, a typical cost of a single mastitis case can be over £90 – if a veterinary health plan helped to prevent just two cases a year it would more than pay for the cost.

### **3) Saves time**

Farm assurance assessors know and trust a health plan bearing the BCVA logo, says Dick Sibley. When the assessors see a correctly signed and dated plan they invariably spend less time checking those aspects on their farm inspections. The assessors trust the plan, and trust that vets, as professionals, will do their jobs in ensuring the farm is up to scratch, he says.

### **4) Reduces medicine use**

By improving disease monitoring and surveillance, veterinary health plans automatically facilitate better preventative regimes – thus assisting in the reduction of medicine use on farm.

“The presence of a proper veterinary controlled health plan is an assurance in itself,” says Dick Sibley. “You wouldn’t get your car MOT’d by anyone other than a fully trained car mechanic, so why get your health plan from anyone other than a fully trained vet,” he adds.

The BCVA NDFAS Herd Health Plan covers youngstock, mastitis, lameness, infectious disease, parasites, biosecurity, and medicines - producing advised protocols for each disease or subject area.

The new database-driven software helps produce the overall health plan through a series of drop-down and search menus. It also helps farmers with record keeping, and simplifies the production of essential reports – such as reconciling the actual medicine use on farm with the medicine supply from the vet, and also its use against recorded disease incidence.

Only vets who have been on the Level 1 course can carry out BCVA health plans, however.

“BCVA is delighted with the uptake of health planning,” says Dick Sibley. “The number of vets we have trained, plus the sales of our software, shows that there is definite farmer demand for veterinary involvement,” says Dick Sibley.

BCVA is also working on the next stage of health planning – to produce software that accurately assesses the cost of a particular disease, and which then helps assess the cost:benefit of prevention. An initial program has been devised by former president Peter Orpin, which is currently being refined and tested. Additional courses in pharmacy and biosecurity are also being prepared.