

## **Farm Health Planning – an unsexy topic but a simple path to extra profit**

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The Journal's Sarah Liddle attended a recent Farm Health Planning meeting in Yorkshire, where she was impressed by the message, but disappointed by the turnout

Over recent months there have been numerous 'Farm Health Planning' meetings and workshops around the country, organised by various groups, including Holstein UK. Even the lure of a free lunch is not sufficient to make some farmers leave a warm farm office or muck covered parlour to attend. Why is that? Perhaps it's the mention of DEFRA and their involvement - many are sceptical about the organisation, but is knocking them when they try to assist helping anyone?

Holstein UK have run a series of meetings recently as a result of a grant awarded from DEFRA to organise and implement FHP. There is a definite misperception that Farm Health Planning is ticking boxes, sticking to rules and regulations while shuffling endless reams of paper. Maybe it's just that you are sick to the back teeth of meetings telling you what to do, when all you want is to buy Delia's new cookbook so you can have a quick tea and sit down and fall asleep in front of Shameless.

OK, if that little rant was enough to make you read on, here is the important bit. The people that will benefit from Farm Health Planning are YOU, and your business. Like anything in life, the more you put in the more you will get out, and the people who could benefit most from learning tend to be those that don't go near the meetings, not those who actually brave the elements (and those at a recent meeting near Northallerton will testify that the meeting was not an easy option with driving rain and piercing wind).

The bottom line - pun intended is that most of the Farm Health Planning tools are available now at no extra cost; computers and facilitators of information collection and transfer such as CIS have been amassing information on your farm for years. Sophisticated models regurgitate this information into endless different formats, but by spending a little time, it can come out of 'that machine in the corner' (the computer) in an easy-to-read format. From there you use your nous (Yorkshire twang for the old grey matter) together with that of your advisors and consultants such as vets and nutritionists to decide which areas of your herd will benefit from change and improvement.

The age old adage of 'if it ain't broke don't fix it' is true. Key areas are nutrition, lameness, mastitis and fertility. On some farms, looking at figures will show all areas could benefit from TLC or dramatic improvements, but on others one area alone may require modifications.

*The figures are there* - this is the simple message that CIS is trying to impart. Graphs for this, that and the other (acidosis and ketosis, high cell counts and calving intervals to name but a few), enable the trendy term 'benchmarking'. More importantly most farmers tend to be driven to improve. Look to see if you own figures are improving or declining year on year. Everyone likes to be better than their neighbours and fellow club members but be wary that systems vary as do results, making benchmarking between farms both demoralising and unfair at times. Simply comparing your own performance over time and actually taking time to study all this available information is the important bit. Improved fertility puts milk in the

tank. Now is the time to capitalise on the good price of replacements and maximising them means more surplus stock sales.

Milk recording is the most primitive of farm health planning, but recording is not enough if you do not use the information. CIS provides a means of knowledge transfer - the level to which they and CDI help your business is entirely in your hands - but at no extra cost accurate information is available at your convenience, allowing you to problems as well as to treat them with the help of advisors.

Simply, Farm Health Planning aided by CDI and CIS can improve animal health and welfare as well as providing economic benefits. Maybe next time there is a meeting you might think again about attending - it might just make you a million!

### **Lameness**

A few notes of interest from a practical workshop organised by Bishopton Vets, Ripon in conjunction with the Farm Health Planning Project for Yorkshire, funded by DEFRA, featuring Roger Blowey.

- Horn growth in a healthy animal is around 5mm per month.
- Foot trimming's purpose is to restore the foot to its correct weight bearing surface.
- Hoof shape is merely a consequence of hoof growth minus hoof wear.
- Long toes alter the weight bearing of the foot, causing the pedal bone to penetrate into the back of the heel which can be a cause of sole ulcers.
- Foot trimming of long toes should involve removing horn from the toe, to even up the sole so the bone then sits level within the foot again.
- A sole ulcer is bleeding in the corium which grows from inside the hoof to the outside; it's an area of weakness which is a mixture of blood and hoof. Sole ulcers are indicative of trauma to the hoof, potentially a few months previously.
- The areas of weakness in the hoof are the sole and the white line where the hoof joins and cements the foot and the rear of the heel where it joins the inside of the foot.
- Nutrition is important in correct hoof production, long fibre in the diet to maintain the rumen pH has been linked to hoof development. Biotin which is made in the rumen is a protein which is needed for keratin production (used by animals for hair and horn growth). Biotin production is curtailed by the enzyme hoofaze which is produced more readily in acidic rumens.
- Digital Dermatitis is the mastitis of the feet. By pre dipping or cleaning teats there is daily disinfection of the udder, Roger Blowey therefore poses the question as to why not carry out daily foot bathing if DD is a problem in your herd.

Attendance at this practical demonstration was much better - is it a case that farmers learn by doing and think that Lameness is an easy to improve technique. All said and done self help classes or meetings can be arranged to help - let the Society know what you need, want and will attend.