

Industry Q&A

With over 47 years' experience in Ireland's agri-industry, Mike Magan, chairman, Animal Health Ireland, and dairy farmer, discusses herd-health challenges and the unique symbiotic relationship between vets and farmers with Shauna Rahman



Q AS CHAIRMAN OF ANIMAL HEALTH IRELAND (AHI), ARE YOU FINDING THAT VETS AND FARMERS ARE HEEDING ADVICE ON ANTIMICROBIAL RESISTANCE (AMR)?

A AMR is a very real problem, and AHI is working closely with vets and farmers on our current programmes that we are constantly developing. Many antibiotics used in veterinary medicine are also used in human medicine. We advise farmers to work closely with their vet and be conscious of the responsible use of antibiotics on farms. Farmers should always discuss all antibiotic usage with their vet, and follow the directions of use, storage and disposal that they are given. We would encourage farmers to avoid using blanket antibiotics across a herd and work with their vet to investigate the cause of disease and only use antibiotics where appropriate. It is important to keep records of medicines used and always explore strategies to prevent and control disease with the vet first before considering antibiotics.

Q YOU HAVE SPOKEN AND WRITTEN ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF MONITORING YOUR HERD'S HEALTH. TODAY, WHAT ARE THE THREE MAIN AREAS OF HERD HEALTH THAT DAIRY FARMERS SHOULD BE MAKING A MONITORING PRIORITY?

A At AHI, our main focus is the eradication of bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD) as part of the Food Harvest 2020 programme, which we are making rapid progress on. The number of persistently infected (PI) animals born

in 2016 is less than one quarter of that seen in 2013, the first year of the compulsory programme. Significant improvements have also been made in reducing the extent to which PIs are retained on farm. These very encouraging results indicate that complete eradication is well within reach, and the measures outlined below, including the continuation of tag testing, are designed to further accelerate progress towards this objective. Tissue-tag testing remains compulsory for 2017 and we have set out clearly on our website, how BVD will only be eradicated if farmers and vets follow our strict guidelines. Veterinary investigations of all herds with PI calves born in 2017 are mandatory and these herds are required to undergo an investigation funded through the Rural Development Plan, and delivered by an approved private veterinary practitioner, within three months of the date of the first positive result. Testing of the dam of PI calves and, where desired, confirmatory testing of the calf must be done by means of a blood sample only. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) has stated that it will meet the cost of the visit by the herd's veterinary practitioner and the cost of testing. The DAFM will also automatically restrict movements into and out of herds that retain PI animals for more than five weeks after the date of the initial test. This will be automatically lifted following removal of PIs.

Neighbouring herds will also be notified, advising them to take appropriate biosecurity measures to minimise the risk of accidental introduction of infection.

The timescale of completion of BVD eradication by 2020 is still achievable and compliance and cooperation from herdowners means the PIs will continue to decrease in the national herd. I do believe that we are on track and the continued removal of PIs and ongoing collaboration with farmers and vets working towards this same goal, will culminate in total elimination. It is challenging but it is doable.

Obviously, other diseases which are more difficult to identify are a problem and tackling infectious bovine rhinotracheitis (IBR) is very important as well as acknowledging the impact Johne's disease can have on herd health.

Q IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT SHOULD VETS FOCUS ON IN TERMS OF HELPING THEIR FARMING CLIENTS WITH HERD HEALTH?

A As farmers, we are a unique group in that we have a designated service provider in vets. Vets are such an integral part of the agricultural sector and their input into eradicating diseases, helping farmers to implement biosecurity and disease programmes on-farm and



educating farmers on the best ways to overcome herd-health challenges in the most cost-effective way, are just some areas in which their expertise is essential.

There is a level of trust and transparency that farmers and vets need to have between each other to build and develop a positive, successful professional relationship and ongoing dialogue is key. Farmers and vets both have to face up to their responsibilities and ensure that farms provide appropriate housing facilities, maintain appropriate hygienic conditions and incorporate the right vaccination and parasite control programmes at the right times.

The role of education is essential in this relationship also and farmers and vets need to create a welcome, safe environment for both parties to do their jobs to the best of their abilities.

Q DO YOU HAVE ANY PARTICULAR GOALS OR AIMS FOR 2018 THAT YOU WOULD LIKE TO ACHIEVE?

A I would like to survey farmers and vets on what other



areas of disease control that they would recommend AHI look into developing programmes for. We want to also start a national IBR programme discussion. AHI is currently engaged in a cost-benefit analysis for IBR control and eradication. A programme will not be introduced until the industry has been convinced of its value and benefit, so we are putting together discussion groups and committees related to this, who will consult the industry and see what the priorities for AHI are for next year.

There is an industry survey already circulating, of which the results will be analysed by a specific Technical Working Group and there will be a series of meetings with stakeholders before we can further progress the discussion. We need to also have a more established Johne's disease programme, but again, more investment and more resources are required before a conversation can be had.

From an international perspective, I was speaking at a conference in Prague with David Graham, CEO of AHI, on our BVD eradication programme. European countries are looking at our AHI BVD model with great interest, which is an extremely encouraging sign. All our future programmes must be industry-led and supported by all facets of the agricultural sector, as this is the backbone of AHI.

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