

VetTechs are starting to carve a worthwhile role for themselves between vet and farmer. Ian Cure, director in Lambert, Leonard & May Farm Vets based in Broughton, near Preston, reports on how they fit in with his practice routine.

# VetTechs are starting to make their presence felt

With the ever present pressure on farm margins, it has never been more important for farmers to account for all their expenditure.

I spent a morning last month huddled round a cup of tea chatting through calf health improvements as part of my Monday morning routine. At the start of winter, the farmer was more than keen to avoid repeats of the previous year.

## Investment

We had gone through his VetInvest report which analyses exactly where farmers spent their money from the previous three years' invoices. The aim is to try and work with our farmers to make as much of their vet spend as possible an investment.

This comes from focusing on areas where there is a reactionary spend, such as mastitis and calf disease. Then we try to put in place some prevention measures



Disbudding calves is just one of the services offered by VetTechs.

which may be a change in behaviour such as parlour routine or on the calf management front, or may involve vaccination.

Whatever the changes over time we always refer back to them to make sure that these measures are delivering a return on that investment.

In this case, calf pneumonia and scour had meant a calf survival rate to weaning of only 63% over the winter. Last month I went to him and his calf survival rate for this winter was 96%. He was thrilled

with the results and his VetInvest showed he had done this without spending any more money. We had picked areas which needed changing and his spend went on more preventative medicines rather than treatments – a true investment.

## Calf management

One area where we have delivered huge improvements has been in calf management. The introduction of our VetTech service 18 months ago has really

revolutionised the youngstock rearing on many farms. They work alongside the farm vet in a team approach to improve farm health.

VetTechs are now appearing in more and more vet practices and I believe they have an important role to play in improving health and efficiency on farm. I took Sammy, our VetTech, to the farm and worked through a plan of how we were going to approach the problem. Some of it was management and the other was vaccination.

We are aware our clients are getting busier with less and less time to plan and organise effective health care strategies. Buying the best products to prevent disease is one thing, but making sure the right animals get their vaccines at the right time is quite another.

The service shortcuts this hassle and farmers end up with peace of mind that their animals are protected when they need to be. The farm in question had used vaccine in the past, but

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openly admitted calves were batched together and often he would miss groups, which is not ideal when disease is circulating.

Vaccination help remains the mainstay of the VetTech activity, and many farmers have reported the service has proved useful in getting the job done at the right time with the right animals.

To maintain your herd's health it is important to keep up-to-date with any vaccinations needed. The VetTechs will help to inject stock, select the relevant animals and bring correct vaccines prescribed by your farm vet. They will ensure suitable records are kept of the amount of vaccine used, the batch number, the expiry date and all individual animal ear tag numbers. A copy is sent out to you to include in your own records. Any second doses are

booked in automatically so you do not need to remember.

We are also finding farmers value extra help for those little jobs which come along once or twice a month, and that can mean their normal workforce is not tied up and not available for the regular workload.

VetTechs can be slightly more expensive than farm labour but where can you find highly skilled labour which can come and work just for a few hours a week?

## Disbudding

Our disbudding service is very popular as calves are done regularly at an early age which reduces the stress involved.

They always receive long-acting painkiller and all this means there is no check in growth. The farmer in question hated dehorning and often left calves too long which meant it really checked them when he got round to it. As a result they often came down with scour and pneumonia after the dehorning session.

When efficiency is the key word, there is no better way to improve it than reducing how many animal losses and disease instances you sustain.

## VetTech jobs

Ian Cure says there are so many jobs VetTechs get involved with such as:

- ▶▶ Disbudding
- ▶▶ Vaccination
- ▶▶ Mobility & condition scoring

- ▶▶ Faecal sampling
- ▶▶ Fly control utilising our novel fly parasites
- ▶▶ Ketosis sampling
- ▶▶ TB testing admin
- ▶▶ Youngstock monitoring – including weighing.