

MAKING SENSE OF MEDICINES

LIVESTOCK

# Create a farm health plan for targeted medicine use

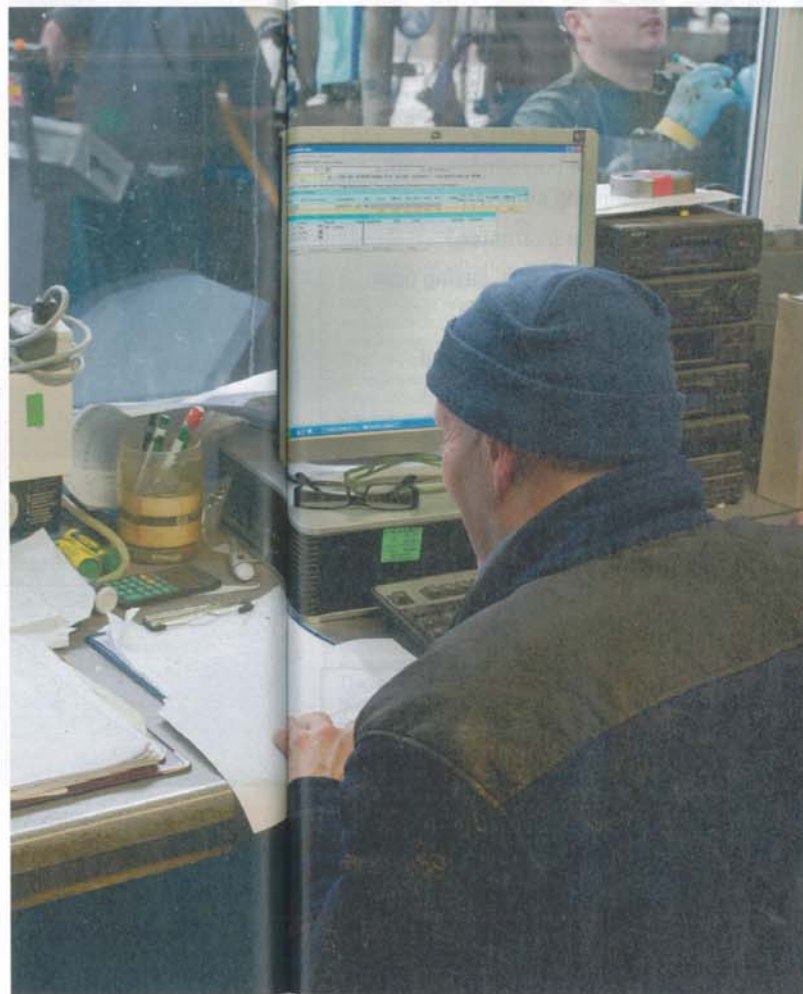
Farm health planning has been fundamental in driving responsible use of antibiotics on a north Somerset farm, as **Debbie James** reports

**M**atching antibiotics to a specific health problem rather than treating every condition with a single product is resulting in improved recovery rates at Barrowvale Farm, Bath.

Philip Langley, who farms in partnership with his brother Richard and parents Ray and Cheri, says

health planning with a view to using medicines responsibly has transformed the farm's approach to treating livestock.

Common health issues and the recommended treatment for each are detailed in a health planning document produced for the Langleys by their vet at the Shepton Vet Group. This document is reviewed regularly



Talking to your vet about which medication is best to use on your farm and what disease prevention measures need to be taken is all part of promoting responsible and effective medicine use.

have used one antibiotic for a variety of health issues, but I now look at which antibiotics are most appropriate for a condition. It is a much more effective approach," he explains.

This system has also resulted in fewer vet visits. "In the past I would quite often have called the vet out if I had a problem with a cow just to get some advice on which medication to use. I no longer need to do that, because we have a series of laminated charts provided by our practice that explain the different products and their uses."

The results he achieves from the medications used are better, too. "Herd health isn't necessarily any better than it was before, but when we do get problems with the animals they tend to get better more quickly because we are matching the right medication to the problem."

"We haven't really changed what we do, we just have a more targeted approach to health problems. For instance, when there is a foot problem I now know there isn't one antibiotic to suit every foot condition. There is an antibiotic for an infected ulcer and another for foul in the foot. Health planning has changed my approach in that respect."

**FARM MEETINGS**

The Langleys run a herd of 200 Holstein Friesians, which calve year-round. They have routine vet visits every two weeks and one of the issues scrutinised during these visits is medicine use.

Regular contact means their vet understands the farm's system, which assists when the herd health

**KEY FARM HEALTH PLANNING STUMBLING BLOCKS**

- \* Herd health plans can be regarded as a means of fulfilling an audit rather than a 24/7 dynamic health discussion interface.
- \* Benefits of health planning might not be obvious; some veterinary practices, however, now have benchmarking leagues that show how farmers are performing against each other in key areas such as lameness.

plan and treatment protocols are formulated.

"It is about sitting down and having a sensible conversation to work out together what medication is best to use, what disease prevention measures we need to take on the farm and which vaccinations are most appropriate to our situation," says Mr Langley.

Protocols detail the plan of action for specific conditions. "In the case of mastitis we would start with an intramammary antibiotic tube and when the case is severe follow this with an antibiotic injection and an anti-inflammatory for pain relief," he says.

Vet Michael Head of the Shepton Vet Group says health planning can help promote responsible medicine use because specific diseases and their causal agents can be discussed with the farmer and related to the best medicine choice. Vaccination and treatment schedules are examined during this process.

**TRAINING**

Farmer clients at the Shepton Vet Group are encouraged to attend a medicines course focusing on the rationale of when to use and when not to use antibiotics. Mr Langley felt this course was very beneficial.

"It was a very worthwhile

to take into account health changes within the herd and any new advice on medications. When an animal needs treating, the Langleys record the symptoms of the illness in this document and the treatment and medication used.

"We can refer back to this information and it means that anyone could come in and see exactly what approach we took with certain conditions," Mr Langley explains.

**ANTIBIOTICS CHOICE**

Mr Langley no longer takes a blanket approach to medication and uses specific antibiotics for specific conditions.

"In the past we would perhaps

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