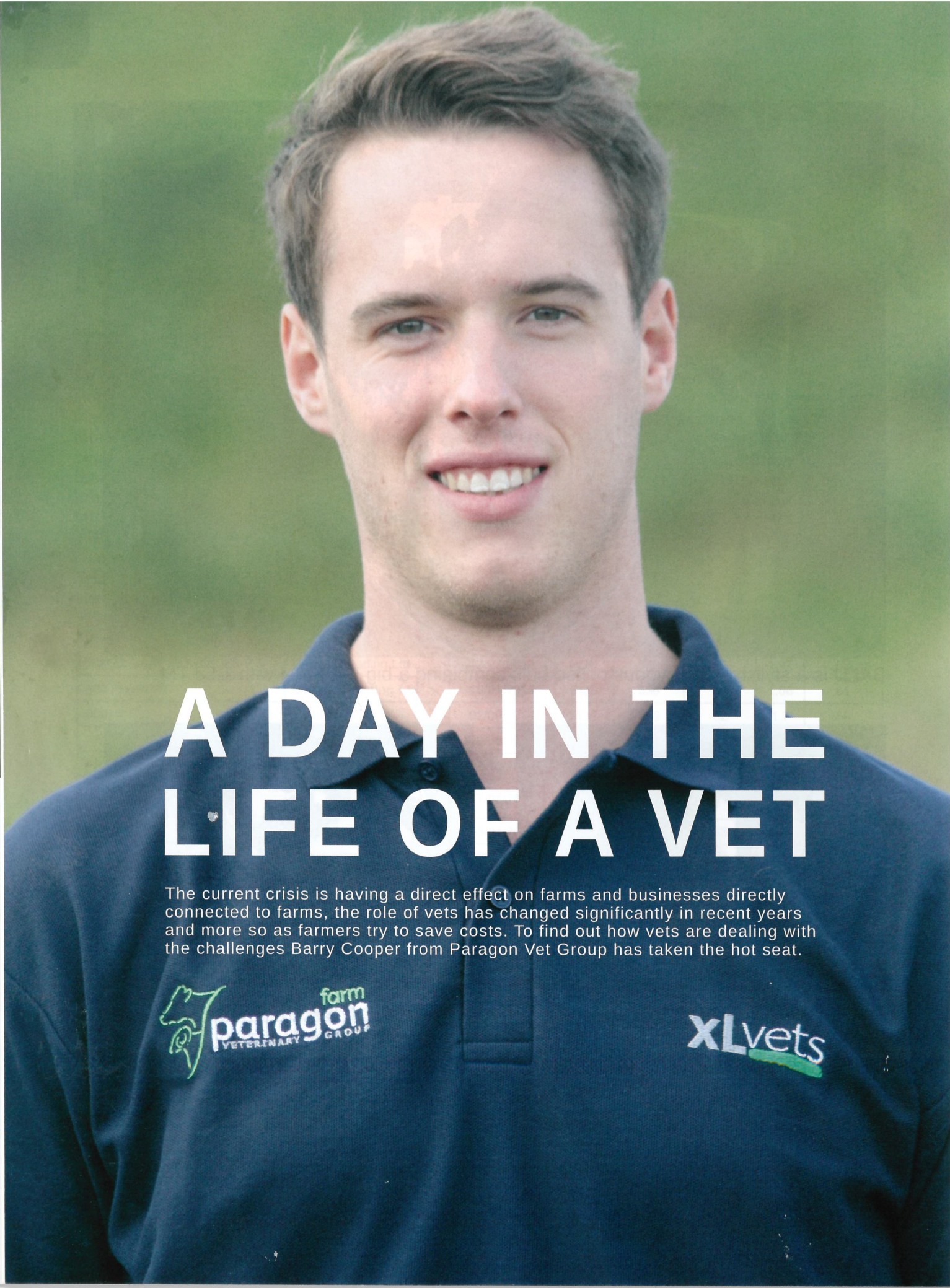

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A VET

The current crisis is having a direct effect on farms and businesses directly connected to farms, the role of vets has changed significantly in recent years and more so as farmers try to save costs. To find out how vets are dealing with the challenges Barry Cooper from Paragon Vet Group has taken the hot seat.

farm paragon VETERINARY GROUP

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What made you want to be a vet?

From a young age I was surrounded by animals growing up on our family farm milking 90 Holstein cows, farming 700 hill sheep and working our squad of dogs. As I grew up I became increasingly interested in the farming industry taking an active role on the farm at home. After sitting my GCSEs becoming a vet became a realistic goal and with my two brothers working at home I was delighted when I was given the opportunity to train as a vet.

What attracted you towards large animals?

My interests and reason for becoming a vet always stemmed from my farming background, so in my mind I was always going to become a farm animal vet. I enjoy seeing the different approaches people take within the dairy industry and like working alongside farmers to get the best from their units. I was always drawn to the active working lifestyle that being a farm vet provides. Another big appeal for me was the opportunity to work with high calibre farms supplying some of the UK's top Holstein cattle. I am fortunate enough that Paragon provides this opportunity.

What experience do you have in vet practice?

Since graduating in July 2014 I have worked for Paragon Vet Group located close to Carlisle. I work in our 10-person farm animal team with most of my time being spent on dairy units. I have learnt a lot from a team that strives to give the best care to the animals and service to our clients, always pushing ourselves to improve and be a leading influence in the industry.

What do you see the involvement of a vet being in dairy enterprises in the future?

With increasing financial pressure on the whole dairy industry I feel it is essential that we are engaging with farmers and ensuring that we are helping wherever possible. Over time I think pro-active work will fill more and more of our working day.

In my opinion this is a positive change and allows farms to be as efficient and welfare friendly as possible - preventing disease rather than incurring the costs of treating it. We at Paragon are also keen to promote the importance of genetics and see genomics being a large part of any future dairy enterprise.

What do you think the biggest challenges dairy farmers will face in terms of disease?

As mentioned above although treatment of individual animals is essential for welfare and profitability, it is the diseases that can cause losses across the entire herd that provide some of the biggest challenges for example Johnes, TB, BVD, IBR and parasitic disease. Through close work with our clients we aim to minimise the impact these conditions have through farm specific protocols.

Managing cows through the transition period is another big challenge for dairy farmers, disease here will not only compromise the cow's welfare, but will have lasting effects on her yield, fertility and likelihood of being culled.

Prevention is better than cure – what should farmers aim to do on a routine basis?

In terms of disease, as a profession, we strongly advocate prevention rather than treatment. The first step in successful prevention is to establish your herd's current disease status and disease risks to your herd. Once this has been determined, routine preventative protocols can be put in place. These may be medical protocols such as vaccinations, dry cow tubes and parasite control, or management protocols for example maintaining high levels of hygiene, appropriate hoof trimming and suitable nutrition. Some of the most common diseases vaccinated for include Bovine Viral Diarrhoea, Infectious Bovine Rhinotracheitis, Leptospirosis, Lungworm, Rotavirus, coronavirus and E.coli.

What do you feel is the best protocol for young stock to give them the best start?

Young stock are a vital part to any productive dairy unit and their care has grown in stature over recent years to become one of the most studied and analysed areas of the industry. It cannot be stressed enough how important it is for calves to get a good start in life, the slightest loss in immunity or productivity at this stage will have significant knock on effects and may never be gained back.

I am fortunate enough to be working within an XLVets practice and, therefore, we implement the calf tracker program on many of our farms. This provides an easy way

to monitor the colostral transfer, growth rates and disease incidence in calves, all of which can be benchmarked to other dairy farms. I believe if you are going to make a truly informed decision on the management of your young stock e.g. justifying a higher quality milk powder or vaccination, this is crucial data to have.

What are the most effective non-withdrawal treatments?

There are a variety of non-withdrawal products available to us if appropriate. However as discussed earlier the best way to avoid withdrawals is through preventative medicine to avoid the disease in the first place. One non-withdrawal treatment that stands above the rest in my mind is fluid therapy, ensuring that the animal remains adequately hydrated has a significant positive effect on recovery.

An example of a typical day in the life of Barry Cooper

8:30 – 10.30am: My day usually starts with a routine fertility visit. The first thing I do on these visits is take any bloods/measurements from the calves on the calf tracker program, I will also attend to any sick calves at this time. Next we move onto the fertility part of the visit, scanning cows for pregnancy diagnosis and any that have failed to show heat. During the scanning we tend to discuss and address any concerns the farmer has since the last visit. Following the fertility work we attend to any sick animals on the farm. Roughly every 4-6 weeks, usually over a cup of coffee, we look through fertility, mastitis and transition cow reports to assess performance and trends.

10:30am – 1pm: The rest of the morning is usually filled with call outs to individual sick animals/ emergencies, for example yesterday it was a fresh calver that needed fluids, a difficult calving and a ketotic cow.

1.30 – 3.30pm: In some afternoons I will have another routine fertility visit booked in. These are usually farms using robotic milkers and, therefore, are not tied to milking times. Other afternoons we will book in other routine work such as castrates/ de-horns, re-checks, PDs etc.

3:30 – 5:30pm: The rest of the afternoon is again spent dealing with any sick animals/emergencies that come in. For example yesterday afternoon I diagnosed and corrected a left displaced abomasum. We are now routinely performing this correction laparoscopically (key hole) in order to minimise the invasiveness, cost, time taken, withdrawals and recovery time. Any quieter times during the day allows us to organise and run discussion groups or meetings and keep up with the reports and protocols discussed throughout.

5:30pm onwards: On call emergencies.