

SURVEILLANCE IN VETS' SCOPES AS BCVA CONVENES FOR CONGRESS

THE annual BCVA Congress returned to Southport from November 24 to 26 – the first time since 2009. It was attended by about 500 delegates.

The major emphasis was on controlling endemic diseases. The word surveillance was frequently mentioned and defined in various ways. The outgoing president, John Fishwick, expressed the aim as "Vets, livestock and the environment: a lot of hot air?"

The provision of up to four streams, including a range of

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looks back, in the first of a two-part article, on some of the topics brought up at the association's annual get-together

workshops, frequently resulted in selection problems. Should one attend "Advances in bovine respiratory disease management" (a hardy annual appointment), or listen to the six clinical club speakers (each with 15 minutes), experience a bTB update or participate in "Inte-

grating TotalVet into routine dairy herd fertility monitoring?"

Seventeen of the verbal presentations were published in the accompanying *Cattle Practice* (proceedings) issues (two and three of November 2011). The absence of the majority of presentations in printed form is

regrettable, if only because the author had more than 40 pages of scribbled (non-shorthand) notes from the three days.

Paul Rodgers' excellent talk on bTB control in Wales is the only printed paper of several presentations on this controversial subject, none of which I could attend.

Food for thought

The opening keynote speaker was Prof Sir David King on the broad subject of feeding a world population due to reach 9.5 billion as early as 2050.

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He calculates that 50 per cent more production would be needed in the next 20 years to cope with these figures.

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Today the world demand for meat is huge, and to a lesser extent, so is the pressure for milk products. Sir David thought there could be a place for dirigibles to shift food economically around the world. India was the biggest meat exporter, while Russia was a major importer.

Turning to the UK and viewing the drop in cattle numbers – from 9.3 million to 8.3 million – he posed the question: how do we talk to the British public in the light of the Krebs and May reports? He thought there was inadequate Government funding of the UK cattle industry. He has had experience, as chief government scientist during the 2001 foot-and-mouth disease (FMD) epidemic, of working closely, on a daily basis, with the veterinary profession, such as Joe Brownlie and Dick Sibley,

as well as with Whitehall and Downing Street.

In a subsequent discussion, Nigel Gibbens, England's chief veterinary officer, pointed out that modelling the spread of FMD failed to demonstrate, with any certainty, the progress and outcome of the 2001 UK outbreak, and he urged the profession and other parties to develop more sophisticated systems for modelling disease spread.

It has been widely thought that the Ministry of Agriculture Food and Farming (MAFF, now DEFRA) was initially very surprised at the sheer numbers of sheep-filled lorries being moved considerable distances to distant UK markets in the early winter of 2001. Had there been a diagnostic blood test for FMD in 2001, the cost of eradicating the massive epidemic would have been less than half a billion pounds. There was, Nigel maintained, "a need to make comprehensive plans before the arrival of the next FMD epidemic".

Urbanisation

Sir David then turned to global problems, such as the important consequences of urbanisation on animal health in India and the African continent.

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He thought there was great potential in national disease eradication programmes, giving liver fluke as an example, and urged the profession to become leaders in this field. In terms of aiming at low carbon production he cited methane production in Rwanda from cattle manure, a system also being adopted in the Punjab. New Zealand was a good example of a country with low carbon production in livestock due to its reliance on pasture grass.

The BCVA president gave Sir David a new BCVA award, the "Brownlie bull", in recognition of his outstanding work for the profession.

Ownership

The second plenary speaker, Joe Brownlie, spoke on the subject of "Who owns disease?", adding other questions, such as "What is ownership of disease?", "What disease?", "Have we the capacity to deal with disease?" and "If a livestock owner has disease, does he own it?".

In terms of endemic diseases, Prof Brownlie said some countries, such as Denmark and Norway, had made good progress in controlling bovine viral diarrhoea (BVD). But who controlled BVD in the UK? Was it the responsibility of the Government, of the chief veterinary officer, the AHVLA, or LVIs from farm practices? In 1980 there had been 400 vets in a MAFF staff total of 1,800. The figure today is drastically reduced, and the Animal Health Board has much to do. Many vets believe BVD is "the biggest infectious disease threat to UK cattle production", but we still await accurate costings for its potential eradication in England. Can the cattle industry speak with a single voice? Can Government take a leadership role? Is funding the real problem?

"Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds," quoted Prof Brownlie from Proverbs chapter 27, verse 23, in the King James Bible.

Education

Christianne Glossop, speaking as chief veterinary officer for Wales, saw potential for increased accountability, cooperation and responsibility for the 12 per cent of UK dairy herds located in Wales.

She believed the educational role of the annual Royal Welsh Agricultural Society Show in Builth Wells to potentially be considerable. Lameness continued to be the major headache of both dairy and sheep farmers in Wales, followed by BVD, sheep scab, mastitis and liver fluke.

Clubbing it

In the clinical club session of six short presentations, Den Leonard demonstrated a useful "calf twister" designed for use

in cows with uterine torsion.

Sara Pedersen of the Nantwich Veterinary Group reported that more than 80 per cent of 90 practice dairy herds had evidence of liver fluke infection. A clinical study using a blood ELISA every two weeks on 60 cows over an 18-month period revealed that 42 per cent were positive for fascioliasis. After infection, antibody levels rose within two to four weeks. Treatment was

performed three weeks after being housed.

Mari Shanks from Carlisle described her technique of transfaunation of rumen contents as a cheap way of restoring normal rumen function, a technique thought to be much more widely used on the continent.

Tim Crawshaw (Starcross VI Centre) and Paddy Gordon (Shepton Mallet) described a recently observed hepatopathy

of imported Dutch Holstein heifers, characterised by elevated liver enzymes and a fatty liver at autopsy, suggestive of a new form of pregnancy toxæmia. Risk factors may include management practices such as "drought grazing".

Handover

At the general meeting, Leominster practitioner Andrew Prail was installed as president for 2011 to 2012, and was

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equipped with the traditional BCVA hammer.

Gareth Hateley and Declan

O'Rourke continue their excellent work as honorary secretary

continued overleaf

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and honorary treasurer respectively, and are supported by an enthusiastic council.

Surveillance

Among several speakers on the theme of surveillance were Eamon Watson (AHVLA Winchester), Jane Gibbens of DEFRA and Jonathan Rushton of the RVC.

All three attempted to define what they understood by surveillance and their particular role in its study. Eamon referred to the continued — albeit rare — reports of anthrax, apparently much reduced from the incidence in the writer's York practice experience in the 1950s.

Among new diseases, besnoitiosis had still not been seen in the UK. Besnoitiosis was well described by Nicole Gollnick at the 2010 BCVA congress as having spread from Spain into

Portugal, and in late 2010 into Germany. Luckily it remains a minor problem.

Farm welfare investigations in 43 herds revealed that in 16 farms (37 per cent), possible negligence was found in the control of lameness. Other investigations have been undertaken into illegal mutilations, such as tail docking and castration without anaesthesia — both illegal in UK cattle, though still legal in the US.

On AHVLA and SAC investigations published regularly in the *Veterinary Record* and covering England, Wales and Scotland, lead poisoning was still widespread (858 cases) with paint (40 per cent) and old batteries (20 per cent) the main sources.

Botulism, which is increasing in continental Europe, was diagnosed in 210 cases by the AHVLA. Another increasing problem is psoriatic mange, which, starting in south Wales, has now spread to neighbouring English counties.

Counting the cost

Another speaker on surveillance, Mr Rushton, asked how much surveillance cost.

He claimed it was a big issue

as the impact of contagious diseases, especially of epizootics, has a relatively slow detection rate, and budget constraints have led to intense scrutiny of resources. The basic costs may be between £3m and £10m.

The role of farmer surveillance, with or without veterinary support, should not be forgotten. Private benefits should be separated from public benefits, leading to the same question as to who should pay: public funds, levy boards and/or dominant consumer groups, such as Tesco. Surveillance should be seen to deliver added value to farm products.

Jane Gibbens of the AHVLA reminded the audience that in Australia surveillance was financed jointly by industry, government and the providers.

In Denmark, since 1973 the costs have been borne through an industrial levy scheme.

The chief veterinary officer supports the concept of spotting disease outbreaks at an early stage, but the country needed more than one source of surveillance data. She asked the audience where the opportunities for more types of surveillance were.

Residue surveillance

Declan O'Rourke spoke on residue surveillance through the veterinary residues committee as part of an EU-wide scheme. Today, florfenicol is seen to be the major problem. There were three case examples followed by occasional examples, such as oxytetracycline and sulphadiazine residues. Sadly, too often poor or a total absence of farm records was found.

He emphasised the important role of vets in maintaining good farm records and of informing farmers of withdrawal periods.

Budget reduction

Simon Hall, also of the AHVLA, which has a total staff of 2,572, anticipated a budget reduction of £30m over the next few years.

"New things" for the official veterinarian included a first response within 24 hours, changes to the format of export certificates, appropriate specialist support, a greater role in surveillance, increased numbers of regulatory inspections, statutory regulation of endemic diseases, and a facilitated exotic

disease response. Is this, he asked, more of the same?

A current hot topic is the procurement of bTB testing, needing clear contracts between purchasers and suppliers, including assured quality, fair pricing, efficient administration and possible delivery of partnership models with veterinary cooperative groups over a wide region. A new training pack was pending.

The AHVLA was very satisfied with the performance of lay testers. Questions remained about the role of the practice, financial remuneration, clinical governance, CPD, training and quality assurance.

In discussion, Simon Hall acknowledged the export certification scheme required an overhaul, and he thought there was a need for a web-based interactive system with use on-demand.

Neil Howie asked about the proposed length of the TB testing contract, which is rumoured to be four years. How would such a project work? Simon replied that the aim was to have "efficient testing". ■



BCVA council members strike a pose.



Andrew Prail addresses the congress crowd.



A DAVID WEAVER spent some years in mixed practice, 22 years in the surgery department of the University of Glasgow's veterinary hospital and eight years as full professor in the food animal clinic of the University of Missouri in Columbia. He had two years' research experience at the cattle clinic in Hanover's veterinary school and a year in a German equine referral surgery clinic. He was the first honorary secretary of the BCVA and maintains his interests in bovine surgery, lameness and other disease problems. Along with Roger Blowey, he is the co-author of the third edition of the *Color Atlas of Diseases and Disorders of Cattle*.

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BCVA past-president John Fishwick with three Iranian vets.