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# The quality of farmer/vet/advisor relationships – minimizing wastage due to poor animal health

Prof. Philip Robinson

Harper Adams  
University

Keele  
UNIVERSITY

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VETERINARY SCHOOL

# A vet in the social sciences – from 2010 to 2023

*Veterinaria Italiana*, 2012, 48 (1), 31-39

## Factors influencing diagnostic sample submission by food animal veterinarians in Mississippi

Philip A. Robinson<sup>(1)</sup>, BVMS, DSVM, MSc, MRCVS,  
William B. Epperson<sup>(1)</sup>, DVM, MS, ACVPM (Epidemiology),  
Carla L. Huston<sup>(1)</sup>, DVM, PhD, ACVPM, Lanny W. Pace<sup>(1)</sup>, DVM, PhD, DACVP,  
Robert W. Wills<sup>(1)</sup>, MS, DVM, PhD, ACVPM (Epidemiology) &  
Arthur G. Cosby<sup>(2)</sup>, PhD

People  
affect  
animal  
health

“**People** are an important factor in **animal health** ... (we) require an interdisciplinary approach where veterinary and social sciences work together on an equal basis...”

De Haan & Rushton, ISVEE XII, 2009 proceedings

# Anthelmintic use in cattle in Wales

## ***A qualitative investigation of the attitudes and practices of farmers and veterinarians in Wales regarding anthelmintic resistance in cattle***

Klaudya Charlton and Philip A. Robinson\*

*Dept. of Animal Production, Welfare and Veterinary Sciences, Harper Adams University, United Kingdom.*

*\*Corresponding author at: Dept. of Animal Production, Welfare and Veterinary Sciences  
Harper Adams University, Newport, Shropshire, United Kingdom, TF10 8NB.  
E-mail: Philip.Robinson.2@glasgow.ac.uk.*

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# Feeding dairy calves – what to feed and how?







*animals*



*Article*

## Appropriate Dairy Calf Feeding from Birth to Weaning: “It’s an Investment for the Future”

Laura J. Palczynski <sup>1,\*</sup> , Emma C. L. Bleach <sup>1</sup> , Marnie L. Brennan <sup>2</sup>  and Philip A. Robinson <sup>1,3</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Animal Production, Welfare and Veterinary Sciences Department, Harper Adams University, Newport, Shropshire TF10 8NB, UK; ebleach@harper-adams.ac.uk (E.C.L.B.); Philip.Robinson.2@glasgow.ac.uk (P.A.R.)

<sup>2</sup> School of Veterinary Medicine and Science, University of Nottingham, Sutton Bonington Campus, Leicestershire LE12 5RD, UK; marnie.brennan@nottingham.ac.uk

<sup>3</sup> School of Veterinary Medicine, College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences, University of Glasgow, Garscube Campus, Bearsden Road, Glasgow G61 1QH, UK

\* Correspondence: lpalczynski@harper-adams.ac.uk

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# Managing dairy calf rearing – attention to detail



Article

## Stakeholder Perceptions of Disease Management for Dairy Calves: “It’s Just Little Things That Make Such a Big Difference”

Laura J. Palczynski <sup>1,2</sup> , Emma C. L. Bleach <sup>3</sup> , Marnie L. Brennan <sup>4</sup>  and Philip A. Robinson <sup>1,\*</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Department of Animal Health, Behaviour and Welfare, Harper Adams University, Newport TF10 8NB, Shropshire, UK; laurap@i4agri.org

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Rank Centre, Livestock Department, Innovation for Agriculture, Stoneleigh Park, Stoneleigh CV8 2LZ, Warwickshire, UK

<sup>3</sup> Department of Agriculture and Environment, Harper Adams University, Newport TF10 8NB, Shropshire, UK; ebleach@harper-adams.ac.uk

<sup>4</sup> Sutton Bonington Campus, School of Veterinary Medicine and Science, University of Nottingham, Leicestershire LE12 5RD, UK; Marnie.Brennan@nottingham.ac.uk

\* Correspondence: probinson@harper-adams.ac.uk

# Dairy youngstock rearing – records and performance

 | Frontiers in **Animal Science**

ORIGINAL RESEARCH  
published: 18 April 2022  
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## Youngstock Management as “The Key for Everything”? Perceived Value of Calves and the Role of Calf Performance Monitoring and Advice on Dairy Farms

*Laura J. Palczynski<sup>1,2\*</sup>, Emma C. L. Bleach<sup>3</sup>, Marnie L. Brennan<sup>4</sup> and Philip A. Robinson<sup>1</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Department of Animal Health, Behaviour and Welfare, Harper Adams University, Newport, United Kingdom, <sup>2</sup> Livestock Department, Innovation for Agriculture, Stoneleigh Park, Stoneleigh, United Kingdom, <sup>3</sup> Department of Agriculture and Environment, Harper Adams University, Newport, United Kingdom, <sup>4</sup> School of Veterinary Medicine and Science, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, United Kingdom

OPEN ACCESS

Palczynski et al. (2022) Youngstock Management as “The Key for Everything”? Perceived Value of Calves and the Role of Calf Performance Monitoring and Advice on Dairy Farms. *Frontiers in Animal Science* 3.

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fanim.2022.835317> DOI=10.3389/fanim.2022.835317

# Focusing on the transition period?

Preventive Veterinary Medicine 194 (2021) 105424



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Why isn't the transition period getting the attention it deserves? Farm advisors' opinions and experiences of managing dairy cow health in the transition period

Emma A. Redfern<sup>a,\*</sup>, Liam A. Sinclair<sup>b</sup>, Philip A. Robinson<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Veterinary Health and Animal Sciences, Harper Adams University, Newport, Shropshire, TF10 8NB, UK

<sup>b</sup> Department of Agriculture and Environment, Harper Adams University, Newport, Shropshire, TF10 8NB, UK





# Animal disease is an economic problem

*Epidemiol. Infect.* (2013), **141**, 91–101. © Cambridge University Press 2012  
doi:10.1017/S095026881200060X

**Economic principles for resource allocation decisions at national level to mitigate the effects of disease in farm animal populations**

K. S. HOWE<sup>1\*</sup>, B. HÄSLER<sup>2</sup> AND K. D. C. STÄRK<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Centre for Rural Policy Research, College of Social Sciences and International Studies, University of Exeter, Devon, UK*

<sup>2</sup> *Veterinary Clinical Sciences, Royal Veterinary College, North Mymms, Hatfield, UK*

‘Animal disease is an **economic problem** with veterinary implications, not a veterinary problem with economic implications, because it **affects people’s wellbeing**. The most evident manifestation is **lost production**.’

**LOST PRODUCTION**

What do you  
see in this  
photograph?



The  
**shadow**  
of a tree

Wall

**Bicycle**

# The shadow costs of disease

*Preventive Veterinary Medicine*, 10 (1991) 195–212  
Elsevier Science Publishers B.V., Amsterdam

195

## Shadow costs of disease and its impact on output supply and input demand: the dual estimation approach

Ivar Vågsholm<sup>1</sup>, Tim E. Carpenter<sup>1</sup> and Richard E. Howitt<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine, School of Veterinary Medicine, University of California at Davis, CA 95616 (U.S.A.)*

<sup>2</sup>*Department of Agricultural Economics, University of California at Davis, CA 95616 (U.S.A.)*

(Accepted for publication 3 October 1990)

Vågsholm et al. (1991) PVM, 10, 195-212,  
[https://doi.org/10.1016/0167-5877\(91\)90004-L](https://doi.org/10.1016/0167-5877(91)90004-L)

How will **diseases** affect animal production processes such as milk production?

3 things to consider:

1. Disease affects **outputs** (e.g. milk)
2. Disease affects the demand for **inputs** (e.g. treatment costs)
3. More disease affects the **shadow costs**

The **shadow costs of disease** are the **loss of profits** from extra **disease** cases – these can often go **unnoticed** by farmers if chronic problem

# Suboptimal animal health – the costs

- Animal welfare considerations – disease affects animals
- Increased treatment and prevention costs
- Premature death and culling of animals
- Reduction of animal output (e.g. lowered milk yield, longer calving interval)
- Reduction of production efficiency (e.g. restricted growth rates)
- Reduction in quality and value for processing and retail
- Direct and indirect effects on human health and wellbeing (zoonoses, stress, diversion of scarce resources)
- Reduction in value, or restriction, of national and international trade



**Lost profit**



# Better livestock disease control requires:

- Clearer awareness of disease incidence and profit and loss
- More effective communication and trust between the relevant stakeholders
- A multistakeholder partnership approach to work together
- A particular need to understand the perspectives of the farmers who keep the cattle

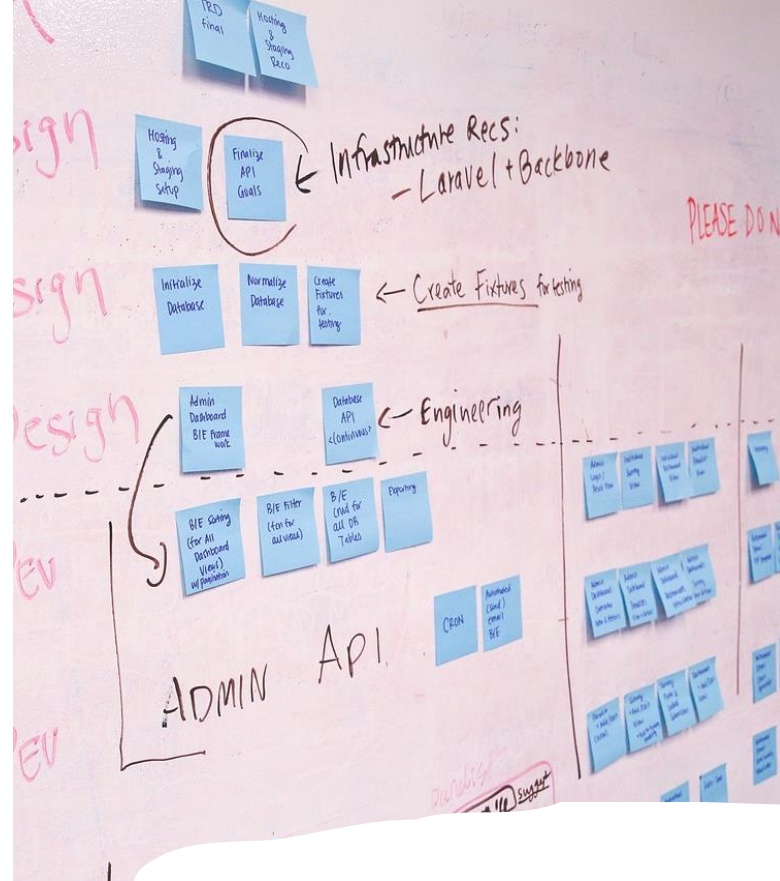
# Reducing disease wastage: the roadmap for this talk

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1. Records and data
2. Building trust relationships
3. Working in partnership
4. Tailoring specific solutions for specific farms







**Records and data**

# Record keeping – a view from 1959

‘The average farmer in Northern Ireland is **not a keeper of records**. However, after initial reluctance, many come to realize the **value of keeping records** and were quite willing to continue.’

J.F. Gracey (1959) ‘A study of **disease incidence and wastage** in livestock in Northern Ireland.’

PhD thesis, Queen’s University Belfast.



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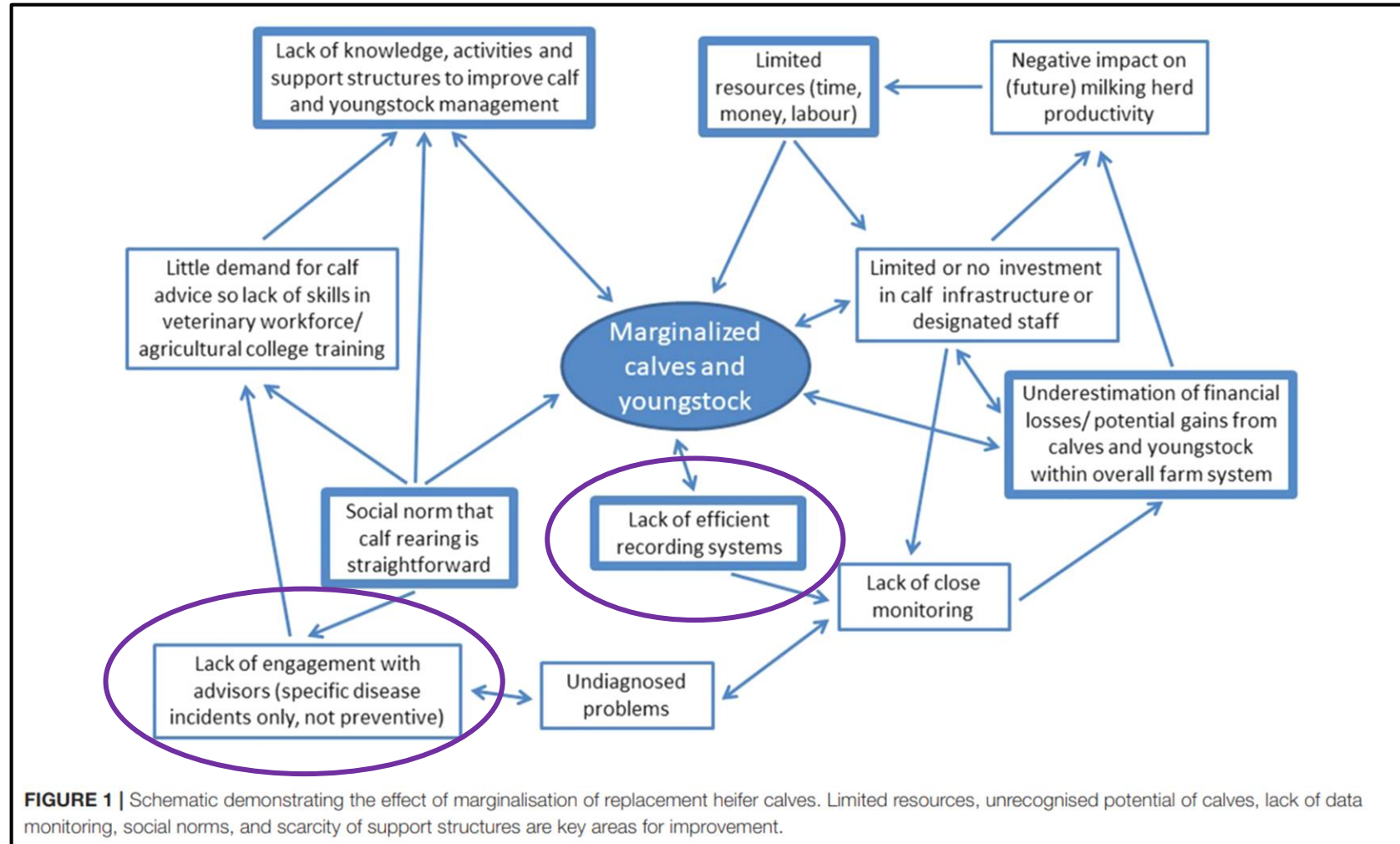
<sup>1</sup> Department of Animal Health, Behaviour and Welfare, Harper Adams University, Newport, United Kingdom, <sup>2</sup> Livestock Department, Innovation for Agriculture, Stoneleigh Park, Stoneleigh, United Kingdom, <sup>3</sup> Department of Agriculture and Environment, Harper Adams University, Newport, United Kingdom, <sup>4</sup> School of Veterinary Medicine and Science, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, United Kingdom

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<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fanim.2022.835317> DOI=10.3389/fanim.2022.835317

# Lack of records and engagement on calf rearing



Palczynski et al. (2022) Youngstock Management as “The Key for Everything”? Perceived Value of Calves and the Role of Calf Performance Monitoring and Advice on Dairy Farms. *Front. Anim. Sci.* 3:835317. doi: 10.3389/fanim.2022.835317

# Failure to record disease

‘Herd health plans, my experience of them wouldn’t be great ... They don’t focus mainly on calves... They ask you to fill in the number of cases of scour and pneumonia . . . well, **most people are making numbers up and don’t really know.**’

Vet V3, Yorkshire

# Disease in the shadows

‘Those 11 TB reactors ... they were all fit and healthy animals, **you wouldn't have picked them out**, and they went on their way ... If an animal is really sick with TB, what does it show?’

Beef farmer A38, Co. Down



# Seeing is believing

**'She was rotten with it [TB] ... It was right through her, and to look at that cow you wouldn't have thought there was a thing wrong with her. I was a wee bit reluctant about letting her go.'**

Dairy farmer A29, Co. Down

# Building trust relationships



# Building trust

Me: "And would you **trust your vet's advice?**"

Farmer: "Well, **usually**, yes – **they're supposed to know** what they're talking about!" [Laughs]

Dairy farmer A2, Co. Antrim

# Building trust

‘Initially I found it very frustrating, because you come out of college very enthusiastic, and the farmer asks your advice and you give it to him. And then the next time you go back an you ask: “How did you get on trying that out?”

And he says: “Well, I was speaking to [my neighbour] and he suggested this, so I thought I would try that out.”

**So until they fully trust you, they won't take the gamble.'**

Vet A45, Co. Down



# Building trust in both directions

‘It’s very slow – you’re not going to walk into a farm and tell a farmer to do x, y and z and expect them to do it.

But over time you can see the difference ... they have to **trust you**, and you have to **trust them**.’

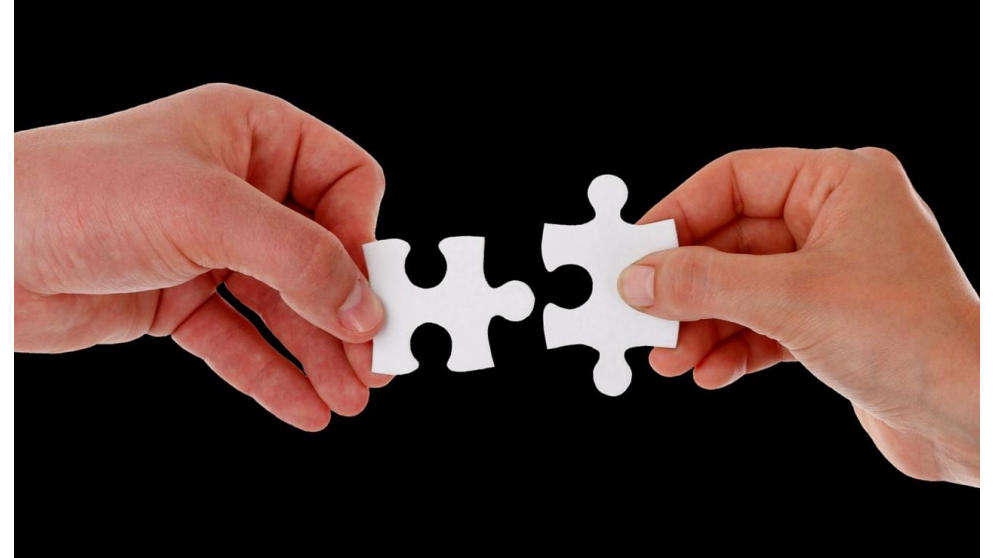
Vet A48, Co. Down

# Evaluating animal health risks

‘Farmers are more likely to evaluate animal health risks **themselves** than to rely on **experts, in whom they have limited trust** ...

Risk is evaluated from a sociocultural perspective, **taking their personal circumstances into account**, rather than in a technocratic manner.’

Palmer et al. (2009) The effect of trust on West Australian farmers’ responses to infectious livestock diseases. *Sociologia Ruralis*, 49, 360-374. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9523.2009.00495.x



**Working in partnership**

# A role for herd advisors?

‘My number one is simplicity ... It’s a no-brainer and I don’t need other people on the farm to hold my hand. **I don’t need the vet, I don’t need the feed adviser, I don’t need the geneticist.** I don’t need any influence, because I get it, and I get on with it.’

Dairy farmer P2, Focus group, Midlands

# Involving the vet?

A11: 'Well, we **vaccinate for nearly everything under the sun**, and plan to that extent.'

'So how did you plan that? Was the vet involved?'

A11: '**We did that ourselves**, and I suppose the vet was a bit involved too. You read about it.'

Dairy farmer A11, Co. Antrim

# Listening and acting

‘You listen to the vet and take on board what they’re saying, but sometimes you **just do your own thing anyway!**’

Dairy farmer A4, Co. Antrim



# Reluctance to change established on-farm routines

‘I’ve got a way of doing things that’s worked for years, and **to me, if it’s not broken, why fix it?**

I’d be disgruntled if I was asked to change things if I had spent time perfecting it.’

Dairy farmer F2, north Wales, on anthelmintic use



# Struggling to break through?



‘It's hard work as vets, constantly pushing and pushing! You feel like you're **constantly nagging them to do something that they're really resisting!**”

Vet B1, Shropshire, on Johne's disease control

# Communication approach?



The farmer



The vet



# Communicating with farmers

‘Sometimes I think vets are so knowledgeable that they almost bore farmers, whereas the likes of you and me are on their level a bit more. **We can speak to [farmers] as they speak to each other.**’

Feed company representative A18, Midlands

# Communication breakdown



“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”

**George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950)**



# Challenges of advisors working together - USA

- Reported conflicts with other advisors over differing expectations of roles and responsibilities in **cow lameness treatment**
- Conflict complicated by their different commercial interests

‘As we continue to explore how to develop stakeholder teams with unified goals, farmers can and likely need to be the champions of the team approach as they are paying these independent advisors.’

Wynands et al. (2021) Dairy farmer, hoof trimmer, and veterinarian perceptions of barriers and roles in lameness management,

*Jnl. Dairy Sci.*,104,11889-11903, <https://doi.org/10.3168/jds.2021-20603>

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# Challenges of advisors working together - UK

- Lack of reported collaboration and competition between dairy vets and nutritionists
- Both vets and nutritionists reported feeling undervalued by some farmers

‘The vet and nutritionist should be working together symbiotically, because how is the nutritionist going to know there is a problem, or vice versa, if there is no communication?’

Redfern et al. 2021

# ~~Problem~~ Solution

**Tailoring specific solutions for specific farms**

# Challenges in communication and collaboration?

- Having different knowledges, speaking different 'languages'
- Different goals or ambitions without understanding each other
- The power and politics of expertise: lay expertise versus professional advisor; advisor versus advisor?
- Need for mutual respect and engagement of different, but mutually-beneficial, viewpoints and rationales

# What are the priorities at farm level?

‘We haven't seen a problem [with Johne's] ... there [are] plenty of other high priorities, so I'm not going to go digging **to the bottom of my priority list** to do something that I don't need to do, because my list is really long [*Laughs*].’

Dairy farmer B06, Shropshire on Johne's control



# Communication and collaboration

"Farmers and veterinarians **must communicate better** to understand each other's perspectives and **establish common goals** within the collaboration if they are to work efficiently to reduce antimicrobial use."

Skjølstrup et al. (2021) Veterinary herd health consultancy and antimicrobial use in dairy herds. *Front. Vet. Sci.* 7, 547975.

You need to come to an agreed consensus on the way forward

# Meeting the needs of the farm

**"It [is] impossible to provide 'one-size-fits-all' consultancy because the best decision depends heavily on the internal logic and **context-bound reality on each dairy farm.**"**

Kristensen and Jakobsen (2011) Challenging the myth of the irrational farmer; understanding decision-making related to herd health. *New Zealand Veterinary Journal* 59, 1-7.

**Advisors need to listen and reflect before providing tailored advice**

# Reducing the wastage caused by suboptimal health

- Particular need to understand the farmer's perspective
- Taking time to listen and to understand: What are farmers doing and why?
- Mutual respect of knowledge and expertise – teamwork
- Co-construction of a health plan tailored to the individual farm
- Ongoing review and refinement over time



**Improve  
communication  
and build trust**

**Work more  
collaboratively as  
a farm team**

**Improve animal  
health and  
welfare**

**Reduce the waste  
of production  
losses**

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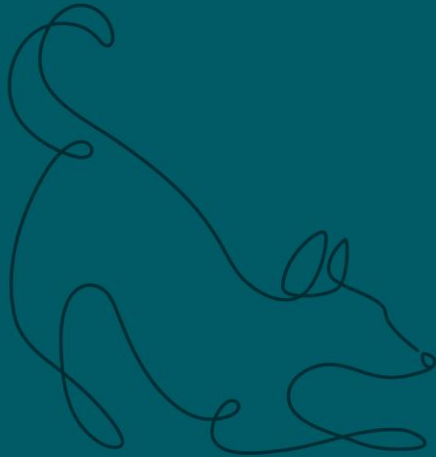
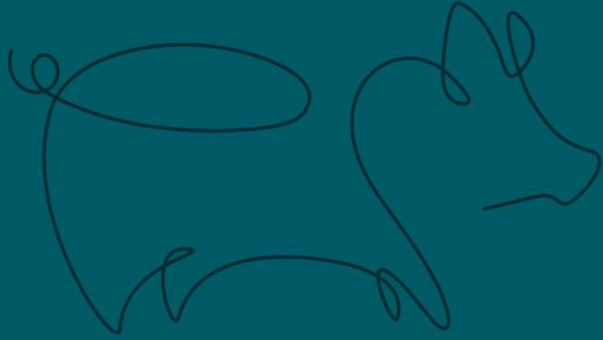
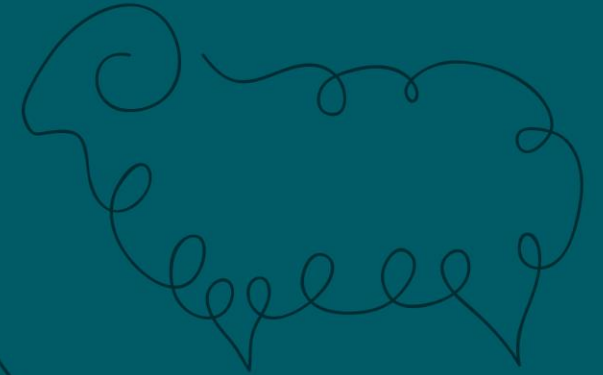
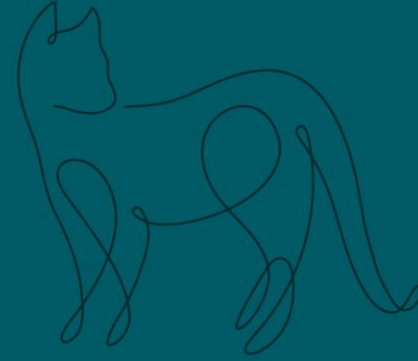
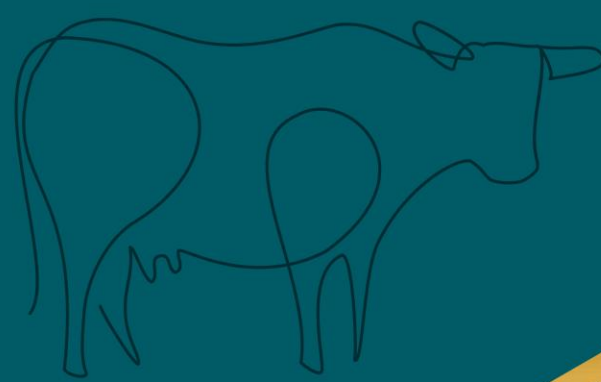




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Email: [p.robinson3@hkvets.ac.uk](mailto:p.robinson3@hkvets.ac.uk)