



BCVA Cattlecast – Fiona Lovatt and Kat Hart

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Kat Hart:

Hello and welcome to the latest edition of the BCVA CattleCast. I am Kat Hart, a cattle vet based in Gloucestershire and Wiltshire, and today I will be chatting to Fiona Lovatt about a new project in collaboration with the RCVS Knowledge. Farm Vet Champions is aimed to empower UK farm vets to establish good antibiotic stewardship, both in practice and on farm, but let's see what Fiona has to say.

Fiona Lovatt:

I'm Fiona Lovatt, I'm a sheep vet. So, obviously I started doing general practice. I never really did a load of small animals to be honest, I mainly did cattle and sheep up here in ... Just near Barnard Castle is where there's the practice. We don't have to tell people where that is now, everyone knows where Barnard Castle is. And so, cattle and sheep was my thing, but I've always specialized in sheep. So, this is proper sheep country, Swaledale country up here. And then, I set up my own business in 2012 and we just do sheep, do a lot of second opinion stuff, vet CPD, working with retailers, that sort of thing.

But in 2016, I got involved with RUMA as the vet representative for the sheet sector, with the Target's Task Force. And I didn't want to get involved, I just kind of was in the wrong place at the wrong time. But it really struck me that when we look at RUMA Target, so over the last four years, as a livestock agriculture in the UK, we've made amazing progress, 45% reduction in antibiotics used. But then, when you really drill into it, it's primarily ... We can evidence it in pigs and poultry, maybe fish industry, but cattle and sheep and stuff that as farm vets, we do every day, that it's much harder to evidence that progress.

And so, although we know we've got amazing examples, pockets of case studies or just things that people are doing in practice, different practices are way ahead and doing loads of good stuff. It's not necessarily that we're doing that right across the board. And I think, I just began to feel in terms of farm vet on the ground, how are they being part of the picture? And could we do something that really struck a chord with vets out there on farm, in the practice? And really recognizing that it's jolly hard work when you've got awkward farmers or a boss who kind of is just trying to make money or you're really, really busy or lack of sleep, whatever it is, we all know what those challenges are like, and it's great having fantastic national headlines, but every day, how does it make a difference with you and your conversation with your farmers? And that's where Farm Vet Champions came from really.

Kat Hart:

That's great. Yeah. It is very difficult, so you quite easily form into a habit of just stabbing with this when you're doing that, without really thinking about it. I think, our knowledge level is quite good about the whole antibiotic situation. It's just how we bring it down to that day-to-day problem of you've got this situation in front of you, what are you going to give it? Or I think the difficult one is you've got the

farmer on the phone asking, "Can you put up this?" And actually, talking through, "Well, does it actually need it?" Taking that step back is really difficult. So, you mentioned there the Farm Vet Champions. Can you tell us a bit more about that?

Fiona Lovatt:

Yeah. It's huge collaborative project. It's spearheaded by RCVS Knowledge, which is a charitable partner to the RCVS, but they've taken on and are leading, but we've tried to get everybody who's got some kind of concern or interest or key organizations, obviously, of which BCVA is a really key one. We've got each of the specialist vet associations. So, obviously where do you go to for best practice for cattle? You go to BCVA.

And so, we've tried to think of farm vet on farm, which species might you come across? So, we've got cattle, sheep, goats, and then birds in terms of laying hens, turkeys, Eddie Grundy style turkeys for Christmas and game birds. So, game birds, it shocked me when we first started working with RUMA, the amount of antibiotics that were going into game birds, unbelievably so. And most game birds are in the hands of the general practitioner, so a lot of practices will have a couple of estates or a few shoots, and they may not be vets who are specialist game bird vets. In fact, they're quite likely not to be.

And in that sense, they're a bit similar to sheep world. There are lots of vets who deal with sheep who are not specialists, just that's what they have to do because they're a vet in practice. So, we thought, can we put information together that's easy to access for somebody who is ... As a vet professional, that's your profession, to deal with every situation, but you may not feel a specialist in a game bird or a sheep or a goat or whatever. So, can we put the real need to know stuff out there in an accessible form?

And we've really tried, each of the modules, we've tried to make them that vets can look at them and think, "Okay, this is something that I can use tomorrow when I speak to that client." So, apart from the species specialist stuff, we've got quite a lot on pharma communications and the vet-farmer relationship and why people behave like they behave. And if we want people to change their behavior, what are ways we can go about that? Recognizing that there isn't just one answer, but there's a whole science behind it, but actually instead of going into the theory of it, it's this once again, something that people go, "Oh, that's a good idea. Maybe I'll try that tomorrow when a farmer phones me, and see how it works." And so, it's sort of teaching on the job and just let's see where it takes people, really.

Kat Hart:

The whole motivating change and motivational interviewing and stuff is really interesting, and I think it splits into those, obviously I'm more of a dairy-focused area of the world and a dairy-focused practice. So, we are quite lucky, I guess, in that our relationship with most of our farmers is very close, in that we're there maybe fortnightly, or maybe monthly, or in some cases weekly. So, you get to know the people really nicely. You can maybe go down there, what sort of personality typing are they and how would you approach them with different ideas and then bring in that whole, how can we motivate change? Do we want it to be their idea? They have to obviously realize it's a problem first and really go through those steps. So, it is quite interesting.

And then, you get the ones which we obviously have less of a relationship with, which for us, is still the beef and sheep, trying to get those ... Starting those relationships and definitely the game birds. I was trying not to laugh then, because there's quite a large practice. What are we up to? 16 vets, it comes to that game bird season, and everyone wants a visit to get the script signed off even before the birds are in, and nobody really wants to do it, but equally we don't feel we have the knowledge to really say no. So, it is a difficult project. Yeah. Thank you. Hopefully it will be really useful.

Fiona Lovatt:

Well, I can so remember, somebody would come in with a chicken and the small animal department would go, "No, no, no, no, no, that's a farm animal." And so, they'd walk around the pavement and then they'd arrive at the farm and we'd go, "No, that's definitely a small animal," and send them back again. And you just think, actually it's kind of ... Yeah, that's reality, that it's difficult to be put on the spot for something that you don't feel is your area of expertise. And so yeah, part of this is just saying, "Okay, here is some basic CPD and can we all help each other in a way?" So, we've got BVPA, British Poultry Association to put those modules together. I've quite enjoyed going through the modules and seeing what people have.

And the motivational interviewing, we've got Alison who did her PhD in motivational interviewing, talking, but you've also got her interviewing Rachel ... So, Rachel Hayton's done the dairy module, but she's also done an interview on motivational interviewing. So, that's quite nice. It's just great to see, we are called to do a lot of different things as a farm vet and there's things we can learn from each other. And actually, that's been the best thing for me being involved with RUMA, to start off with, because I am so sheep focused that I kind of hadn't looked at what other sectors were doing. And I've learned stuff from the fish guide and the poultry and the ... It's good to learn stuff across species. It's been quite inspiring.

Kat Hart:

Yeah. So, there you've mentioned Rachel, who's again, one of the BCVA board members who took on the dairy topic, which was quite a challenge to fit that all into a 45 minute slot. And then I took on the reins, as it were, for the young stock section. So, a webinar on that covering both the dairy replacement heifer as well as more the calf rearer, which I think is often quite a difficult area and a difficult conversation for those practices to have, and those vets to have, because again, you often don't have the close relationship with them.

I think the tradition of them seeing the vet as really a out and out cost is quite difficult to get past and really spend some time to do some of that proper herd health planning, not just filling in a form and ticking the box, but actually going through, "What antibiotics are you using and why?" Rather than a, "Well, we always jab on arrival and it works." Well, actually let's try not do that and see if it doesn't work or equally, have we looked at all the other vaccines that are available? Because there's such a plethora now of pneumonia vaccines available, let's try some different ones.

So, it was quite nice to be involved in it and try and take a step back and see it from a different route. I think it was important to try and keep that practical aspect still going, in that I am still a vet on farm, day in, day out, and see what has worked for me, even though there's obviously, N equals one in a lot of these case study bases. But some evidence is coming and getting there obviously, as more and more focus is put on antibiotic usage, but a lot is still theory based. So, trying to get some confidence in vets and trying to teach them that actually we can be brave and try new things rather than I think, we seem to be pushed in a corner a lot of these times and go, "Oh yeah, the farmer's rung up and wants this drug, is that okay?" Kind of a position.

Fiona Lovatt:

And none of us wants to be in the position where the farmer's saying, "I wanted that, you didn't let me have it, and I had calves die or lambs die." And we do err on the side of caution. And so, a lot of the Farm Vet Champion stuff, we've taken a more holistic view and not said, "Okay, for this condition, what antibiotic would you want to use?" But we've gone way, way before that and said, "Can we plan ahead? Can we put things in place? Can we talk to people about it before the calves arrive and make sure that

we prevent issues by having things right, and protect animals with vaccination." And doing it from that angle rather than us ... I think as vets, sometimes we think disease and we're faced with disease, and we want to sort that problem. And it's not new to be talking plan, prevent, protect, but it's kind of helping people to approach it from that angle.

Kat Hart:

Yeah, no, I think just making it quite practical and those sort of more hints and tips on how to start those conversations, hopefully within the webinars on the species, then you'll get a bit of background knowledge of some ideas that have worked. And then, with the more broader subjects about the motivational aspect, then hopefully we can get some real change to happen throughout the industry really.

Fiona Lovatt:

Yeah. And actually, so we've had phase one, the fundings will be provided by the VMD. So, phase one was getting the training materials up on the platform and it will literally be ready in the next week or so. People who've already signed up as a Farm Vet Champion, by the middle of April hopefully ... You never like to over-promise with IT things. It will actually be available to access. It's all free to access. You just have to go to the RCVS Knowledge site and sign up as a Farm Vet Champion, then you can start accessing that training.

And then, the next phase, which we're just starting with is actually I think more exciting. It's not just, "Here's the training." It's actually encouraging people to set smart goals and to track those goals. So if you say, "Okay, I want to talk to 10 dairy farmers about the dry cow therapy or whatever it is, and I'm going to have this conversation by the end of June, that's my goal." Then the platform will ask you at the end of June ... This is how I'm hoping it's going to work anyway. It's not there yet, but we'll come back to you and say, "You set a goal, how have you got on with that goal?" And you'll have the option to say, "Oh yes, tick, I've done that." Or, "Actually that wasn't quite as achievable as I thought, so I'm going to change that goal." Or, "No, I haven't managed it." But at least you're tracked and motivated.

And so, because we're building a bit of a community, then hopefully we can encourage each other. And people who have got fantastic examples of what they're doing well, and they shout about it or share a case study, and then you think, "Oh, I could try that with my farmer." Hopefully that's how it's going to work.

Kat Hart:

Yeah. We all start out with really good intentions, but unfortunately life takes over and those emergency calls start coming in and these things do slip. So, keeping track of that is really important to keep everyone motivated and sharing everyone's stories, and trying to make us feel like we're all in it together rather than the feeling of, oh, I'm saying, "No, you can't have this product," and they're just going to go next door and get it. I think is really important to make us feel that we're all fighting the same battles really.

Fiona Lovatt:

But we're all in a bit of a different place, so it is no good us saying, "This is your goal. You have to do this." Because it may be that your practice is actually way behind or way ahead and actually, the goal for you might not be the same as the goal for somebody else, but you all kind of got some control over what you think, where you need to make progress with your farmers or whatever. So, it's tailored to individuals as opposed to a set thing.

Kat Hart:

And so, you mentioned there how we can get involved. Can you just go into that in a bit more detail? So, hopefully all our listeners that are motivated to get involved and to join, how we can go about that.

Fiona Lovatt:

Okay. Yeah. You want to go to the RCVS Knowledge website and it's literally /farmvetchampions. Although, I think it comes up on the homepage at the moment and then you click through and register that you're interested. Then as soon as a platform is available, which will literally be by the end of April, you can access into it. And then, you can register your CPD and track your goals as you're going through. But bear in mind, it's literally just there, so at the moment it is just training you can access. Both yeah, the species specific stuff, the farmer communication stuff, and the general modules on one health things or on AMR and how it develops, and some of the latest learning in that. So, any of that's free to access in your own time. But signing up, then we've got your email and we can communicate with you.

And then, if you're able to shout about it on social media, that is #farmvetchampions, that's really helpful because it helps encourage other people. Tell your colleagues about it, tell your friends, tell your dog. Just generally. We've got five and a half thousand farm vets in the UK. It's open to everyone. There's no limit on who can join up from a practice. If you move practices or go on maternity leave or whatever, you can take your status with you. But when the platform's up and running, we're hoping that you'll be able to access practice goals as well as your own personal goals. So, within the practice, you can maybe hold each other responsible, encourage each other, work on the same goals, that sort of thing.

Kat Hart:

Yeah. That sounds really great. And to share it between a practices is quite important, but equally to have the flexibility with some smaller practices or if you've got your own personal area that you work with, to do your own goals, I think is great and should cover all aspects. And they're getting involved on social media with the #farmvetchampions. Hopefully again, we'll make everyone feel like we're doing it together and we can cover social media with really positive stories of both animal welfare, as well as lowering antibiotics and hopefully improving productivity as well. Because I think there's still the barrier in some definitely, farmers minds, but equally I think in the back of vets minds, that sometimes they don't all go hand-in-hand.

But I think if we attack them in the right way and plan for them in the right way, it's not that you should lower antibiotic use and accept that we're going to have more disease or lower productivity, we can get it all. It should be a win-win story.

Fiona Lovatt:

Oh, totally. Yeah. So, we're looking at good, healthy animals, planning ahead, prevent inspection, protecting the herd or the flock and that's really satisfying veterinary stuff to do, isn't it? It's not just turning to a medicine. And it's responsible antibiotic use, so where it's necessary to use an antibiotic, use an antibiotic. Just that's the whole point, really, that we can preserve our access to antibiotics and use them where we need to. I want to be able to treat animals where I have to, but I equally want antibiotics to work, if one of my kids goes into hospital or similar, we are all in this together very much so.

Kat Hart:

Thank you for listening to the BCVA CattleCast about how to become a Farm Vet Champion. So please, if you're feeling motivated to sign up or just find out more, please go look on the RCVS Knowledge website or of course, use the #farmvetchampions. Thank you and goodbye.