

The UK ruminant antibiotic stewardship roadmap

RCVS Knowledge

Welcome to this special episode of the RCVS Knowledge podcast, the co-chairs of the new antimicrobial stewardship initiative. Fiona Lovatt, David Black and Mark Jelley discuss the UK Roommate Antibiotic Stewardship Roadmap, a project that aims to drive more responsible antibiotic use in the room sector. Whether you're a vet, farmer or work within the room sector in any capacity, we want to hear your views.

You can contribute by filling in the survey at bit.ly/ruminant-roadmap. That URL again is bit.ly/ruminant-roadmap.

Fiona Lovatt

Okay, so this is the RCVS Knowledge podcast and today we're talking about the UK Ruminant Antibiotic Stewardship Roadmap. So I want to introduce David Black, BCVA President and a farm vet from Cumbria and Mark Jelley, the Cattle Antibiotic Gardening Group Chair and a beef farmer from Northamptonshire and myself Fiona Lovatt.

I'm the chair of the Sheep Antibiotic Guarding Group and also the clinical lead for medicines at RCVS Knowledge. So we're discussing the ruminant antibiotic stewardship roadmap and this is our chance as cattle and sheep, farmers and vets and the supply chain to step back over the next nine month period to look about what we can do effectively to demonstrate our responsible stewardship of antibiotics and to investigate opportunities, barriers and challenges to this happening throughout the UK. So I'm just going to turn first to Mark and say, Mark, why do we need this roadmap?

Mark Jelley

Thanks, Fiona. Yeah, I mean, from the farmer's point of view, we know that the demonstration of responsible antibiotic use is becoming of increasing importance, both to consumers and also as a result of that to the supply chain that we're part of and that we supply. As farmers, we're already legally obliged to record our purchase and use of veterinary medicines, but turning this requirement into evidence of responsible use whilst also being confident that our data is being used responsibly by those who have access to it is actually really quite hard. We know that we have to record what we use, how we use it, but that can be with paper records, it can be with software, and a variety of other ways as well. And as a result of that, actually drawing that data together as evidence is difficult.

Now other food producing species in the UK are able to demonstrate their medicine use with confidence and many competitor nations are also now starting to legislate for this data collection as well. And the ruminant sector, sadly, is beginning to be left behind. So the reason for this work is quite simple. It's trying to establish how we can draw together all of the parallel threads that are running in various places to end up being able to demonstrate with confidence to both the consumers and to our supply chains and to governments as well for that matter. How we can use medicines responsibly or how we are already using medicines responsibly and what we can then do to build on this evidence to provide reassurance to our customers.

Fiona Lovatt

Yeah, brilliant. And it's not as if nothing's happened up to now, has it Mark? Like we've been doing a lot of this for a while, looking at responsible use of medicines. we're building on what's already gone before rather than starting again. Is that fair to say?

Mark Jelley

Very much. mean, we've already got the largest data set across the remnant sector of anybody in the UK in terms of species, but we have a huge number of producers far more than any other species, food producing species in the UK. So from that point of view, we're looking at a much larger producer base and they are much more geographically spread. they are much more diverse in terms of the type of systems they're running and things like that. So it becomes really quite challenging actually to when you look at the percentage of coverage of the sector to appear to be providing the same level of data as other food producing sectors are such as the pig and the poultry sectors and the fish sectors for example.

That said, the data that we've got today has been really good. We have a system that collects it well. But as with everything, there's always opportunities for improvement. And it's that opportunity for improvement that we're looking to both identify and then build on. Because we're in a place where, as a species or as a sector, the ruminant sector, we've actually got a really, really good story to tell, one that consumers want to hear as well. And it will be great to be in a position where we can actually share that with confidence and evidence behind it as well.

Fiona Lovatt

Yeah, brilliant, brilliant. And so I'm going to go to David. Why is this important that farm vets are part of this process, David?

David Black

Well, I think Mark's summed up beautifully some of the key points there in that my understanding is that most of us as farms vets, livestock vets, believe that we're doing a good job with medicines. We are the gatekeepers for medicines and we are doing a good job, but it's very difficult for us to evidence that. It's very difficult to evidence responsible use of all our medicines across the food chain. Some sectors are better at it,

as Mark says, than others, and ruminants and particularly mixed species farms are particularly hard to actually identify it.

I guess as vets, we've got role in that as I say, we're the gatekeepers, but secondary, we want to be able to keep all the tools in our toolbox. And if we're not careful over the next number of years, we might find that we lose that social license that we've currently got, that current trust that we have from farmers, from the consumers, from government, from legislators to use the tools that we currently have.

And if we are not careful, somebody at some stage will say, right, we're removing the right to use these antibiotics, for example. So we've been very, very good about managing the critically important antibiotics. And I think actually this roadmap is more about understanding how it's been done, what's been done, where the evidence is, how we can combine all that together. It's not, as I understand it, going to be a set of instructions as to how to do things. It's going to be an understanding of what we were currently up to. And therefore, together we can work, demonstrate responsible use. And actually it'll not just be of antibiotics, it'll be of all medicines that are used on the farm.

Fiona Lovatt

Okay, that's really helpful. Thanks, David. But if we just go back to antibiotics as prescription only medicines, then the vets are completely key in that, aren't they? And in demonstrating it is in all of our interests to be able to show everybody what a good job we're doing or, where things can be improved for us all to identify that and move forward together. So I suppose it's just worth us going into exactly what we are doing and how this roadmap is coming together. So we've literally got less than a year to pull all this together. And we're starting by gathering views from right across the sector, from vets, from farmers and from people working right throughout the supply chain, both red meat and dairy farmers and vets and supply chain. So we want to know what's currently working well, where things could be made easier or what barriers people

think they face. to the point that as we've gathered enough evidence, we will meet in person in June to properly thrash this out and for key personnel to make commitments on behalf of their organization or the people they represent as to how we can all move forward together. So make an agreement as to what are the key important things and how we move on these together. And do either of you want to jump in with something about the actual process?

David Black

I do think it's important Fiona that we don't get seen as Groundhog Day that we're starting to try and reinvent some wheel that's broken. This is very much about trying to align the good stuff that's already happening and understand the good stuff and get all the energy channeled in one direction. So as you quite rightly say, the first thing is to get a good survey out there to try and get as many people as we can get to fill in that survey either as individuals or as representatives of their organizations so that we can understand for a start what has been done and what people's perspective is on this. And then we can move on to the next stage, which is going to be to try and discuss and align the current activities within the sector.

Fiona Lovatt

Yeah, brilliant. Thanks for mentioning the survey there, David. And that would be a ask for people, isn't it? As a key action for people to take away from from listening to this would be to access the survey, complete it for yourself because we want to know what your views are, whether you're a farm vet or a farmer or have any interest in this whatsoever. The survey is designed across the sector. It's quite neat. asks people specific questions specific to their own role, but also to cascade it onto if you're a vet and you've got farm clients then to send it on via WhatsApp or your practice newsletter or just as you're talking to farmers get their opinions because we can't really demonstrate, it's hard to demonstrate with such a large sector if we don't have views from quite widely. This is not something that just a couple of us have an opinion about. We need to go more widely. Have you got comments there Mark?

Mark Jelley

Yeah, I mean, as far as the farmer part of this goes as well, we're not asking questions that are really, really difficult that a farmer is going to struggle to answer. We're asking questions which will give us a broad idea of the type of farmer that is engaging with the survey, whether they're a sheep farmer, a cattle farmer, and that kind of thing. And then we're asking them very, very simple questions about what they currently do, what their current practice is for recording information, for example. And we're not looking to delve into that, to mine it for, to look at their antibiotic use and criticize it or anything like that. We're literally just trying to understand where people's data capture might be at the moment and what their experiences of that is to date.

So to summarize the survey itself, it is completely anonymous. As people, you're put in your role, but none of the data will be directly attributable to any single person we don't collect names and addresses. If you want to be entered in the prize draw, that's done completely separately and not connected with the information you put into the survey. We're then working with researchers from the RBC through the AMAST network and so the information will be collated in an appropriate way and then the results will be fed back to the in-person summit, which is happening in June. So at that point, we'll have collated everybody's opinions, understandings, and we'll have a nice broad base, both from the survey, which is very broad, but asking quite simple questions. And then there'll be some in-depth focus groups and interviews of people who have really thought about this and feel they've got more to offer.

We'll delve deeply and to get their opinions. This will all be fed back to the in-person summit, which will be quite a structured event and will actually and professionally facilitated so we can gather key personnel's commitments and how we feel as an entire industry, we can move forward together and we can collate these opinions in the in-person summit which will then take a month or so to turn around and it will be reviewed across the board with everybody clear on what their commitments are, what

they're signing up to and how we're actually going to act on them as an industry. So we'll have moved to a point we know we've got full buy-in across all vets, farmers and supply chain involved in the cattle and sheep sectors that kind of summarises exactly where it goes.

Fiona Lovatt

So Mark, as chair of the Cattle Antibiotic Guarding Group, you've been working very closely with Ruma and the targets. How does this roadmap fit into the sheep and cattle particularly targets going forward?

Mark Jelley

It could become a really useful tool for us because within the ruminant sector, already have targets and especially within the cattle sector, for example, that we've had new targets this year around calf oral antibiotics to monitor and reduce the use of those products. But actually, this could really help us to highlight other areas which had significant benefits for the sector. And it's always, it's not about necessarily reducing use. It's about demonstrating responsible use. And it's important that we remember that. That has to be front and centre of everything that we do. At the same time, if there are ways we can provide additional reassurance to our customers, in particular our consumers, that's got to be a good thing.

David Black

Can I just add, let me say something else, you want, I'll see if this helps you. Can I just add to that, that what we're really also looking for from this process is to develop some leadership or to encourage some leadership across the whole supply chain for those organizations that are closely involved, for those individuals closely involved, for all of us to step up together and demonstrate leadership to be able to evidence and justify, as Mark has quite rightly alluded to several times in the past, that it's not about necessarily reducing antibiotic use. It's about using the right antibiotics at the right

time in the right way and being then able to evidence that, that we're using them correctly.

Fiona Lovatt

Yes, and the way I see that is a win-win. It's a win for the farmers because they're demonstrating good reputation for the product, but it's a win for vets who are prescribing responsibly and wanting to demonstrate that. So in terms of why vets should be involved, what is it in it for the vets?

David Black

Fiona, what's in it for vets is that we are the gatekeepers for medicines. We have the right to prescribe but the privilege to dispense. And currently we need to be able to maintain that trust and build on that trust even further, that we are doing that responsibly and that we are maintaining the medicines that we need to support our farm clients to be able to treat the animals appropriately when it is required.

And if we are not careful, then we're gonna lose that social license and we'll end up in a situation whereby there's much more control, in which case the farmer's gonna lose, the vet's gonna lose that involvement. And fundamentally, there's a risk that the animals are gonna lose out because we're not gonna have the tools that we need to treat them appropriately.

Fiona Lovatt

Yeah, brilliant. And at the end of the day, animal health and welfare is key. Yeah, thank you very much. That's great.

David Black

I think it might be just helpful to sum up what we want people to do and that's a partake in that sign up and let us know that you're interested and that you have an opinion and let us include that within the forming of the roadmap. But most particularly you can do that by partaking in the survey of which the link is attached and cascading the survey on to any clients, any colleagues and anyone else you know who has an opinion in this area and whose views would be valuable to capture. And it's just worth saying we're

looking at cattle and sheep sectors. So that's dairy, beef and sheep. And we're looking across the entire UK. So including what's happening in Wales, in Scotland, in Northern Ireland and in England as well. But it's very much across the UK and across all ruminant species. And I think what's also important to say Fiona is that we're really looking for people to engage with this process and take ownership of it. We don't want it to be something that gets done to people. We want people to really feel some stake in this and to feel some ownership of it and to actually feel they've contributed to the discussion as we move on to the next phase.

Fiona Lovatt

Thank you both very much.

RCVS Knowledge

We hope you've enjoyed this episode of the RCPS Knowledge podcast with the three co-chairs of this exciting new project. This written invigorated effort brings together stakeholders from all parts of the UK room sector via the UKRI funded AMAST network. Whether you're a vet, farmer or work within the room sector in any capacity, we want to help you. You can contribute by filling in the survey at bit.ly/ruminant-roadmap. That URL again is bit.ly/ruminant-roadmap.

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