MONDAY 29 FEBRUARY 2016

‘Wellbeing’ for animals, people and the environment

The veterinary profession has some unique characteristics, including an ability to increase the wellbeing not only of animals, but of people and the environment. That’s because all three are ‘joined at the hip’ when it comes to wellbeing and any shortcoming in the wellbeing of one, affects the others.

This is why we’re taking an increasingly ‘three dimensional’ view of our work, across animals, people and the environment. We have carefully thought about the difference we can make and the greatest value we can bring.

You may have noticed I’ve used the word ‘wellbeing’ several times already. There’s good reason for this. Welfare measures and regulations have played a vital part in setting minimum standards for the treatment of animals, and will continue to do so. But as awareness of the importance of animals in our lives has grown, so too has a sense that welfare standards should reflect society’s attitudes, not simply act as a minimum standard of behaviour.

We are beginning to work with other groups to understand how we can, collectively and as a country, consider our actions from an outcomes perspective (wellbeing) rather than solely a minimum standards perspective (welfare). This means better understanding how animal wellbeing affects human and environmental wellbeing. It also means less ‘ambulance at the bottom of the cliff’ and the provision of solutions to complex issues that require an evidence-based approach. An example is our commitment to addressing antibiotic effectiveness for animals and humans, with the goal of reducing the use of antimicrobials in animals to emergencies by 2030. This is already gaining momentum with the formation of a Pan Sector Governance Group (Ministry of Health, Ministry for Primary Industries, with NZVA membership).

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Veterinarians at the leading edge of change

Listen to NZVA President Dr
Our President Caroline Robertson spoke on Radio NZ's Nine to Noon, articulating the need for a broader, more all-encompassing approach to improving our collective wellbeing. She described veterinarians as 'invaluable problem solvers' with the capability and willingness to deliver solutions to issues across animals, humans and the environment.

Vets@Work provides a glimpse of the progress we are making, including advances in the welfare and wellbeing of animals in NZ, research to reduce the country's most common zoonotic (animal to human) disease, and achieving minimum use of antimicrobials without compromising animal health, welfare and wellness.

We are always keen to hear from you and to answer any questions you may have.

Julie Hood
Chief Executive
New Zealand Veterinary Association

Bobby calves - Improving welfare and wellbeing

The veterinary profession is working with industry organisations to improve bobby calf welfare and wellbeing, including fast tracking enforceable regulations and implementing an industry-led non-regulatory reform programme.

"The magnitude of this issue cannot be underestimated. This is about ensuring best practice animal stewardship and an ongoing effort to be world leaders in animal welfare and well being," says NZVA Head of Veterinary Services Dr Callum Irvine.

"As a society, expectations about how we treat animals have and continue to evolve, and we need to be proactive in meeting them. It also impacts the sustainability of our agricultural sector and the way we are perceived by consumers, both domestically and abroad, who rightly demand high standards of care for animals."

He says the NZVA is working with industry organisations across the supply chain as part of a Supply Chain Representative Association Group to achieve meaningful change.

Veterinary careers in demand

Veterinarians are among the highly skilled professionals in demand to support New Zealand’s primary sector, according to the latest Occupational Outlook report, which says veterinarians make a 'real difference to the health and wellbeing of animals, humans and the environment we share.' The report says veterinarians have high income and job prospects especially in mixed animal practices. The breadth and diversity of our profession, and the career opportunities this offers, are also showcased along with information to prospective students about veterinary
“While there are only a small number of operators within the industry’s supply chain that don’t meet their obligations under the Animal Welfare Act, we must do better to ensure that there’s a clear understanding of obligations to improve welfare outcomes.”

The NZVA’s Dairy Cattle Branch developed a discussion document for reform of the bobby calf industry at the end of last year, which includes proposals for regulations for collection, transportation and processing. These proposed reforms are underpinned by an evaluation of scientific literature around bobby calf welfare, including international standards, and have been circulated to the Supply Chain Representative Associations.

Dr Irvine says that welfare outcomes for bobby calves have improved in recent years owing to initiatives such as the MPhed Farm to Processor Animal Welfare Forum, which the NZVA has been a part of.

“Howver we also need enforceable regulations to ensure that welfare standards for bobby calves are exemplary and to communicate best practice across industry so everyone is clear about their responsibilities for the welfare and wellbeing of bobby calves.”

Public consultation on bobby calf regulations is planned for the first half of this year.

*Ministry for Primary Industries, Dairy NZ, the NZVA, Meat Industry Association, Dairy Companies Association of New Zealand, Federated Farmers, the Road Transport Industry Forum, and the New Zealand Pet Food Manufacturers Association.

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**NZVA 2030 antimicrobial vision - catalyst for change**

The NZVA has developed a framework to advance its aspirational statement ‘By 2030 New Zealand Inc. will not need antibiotics for the maintenance of animal health and wellness.’ The framework seeks to guide the development of a national strategy on antimicrobial use in New Zealand. It recommends a strategy based on a 6R structure: Recognition, Responsibility, Reduction, Refinement, Replacement and Review. It also identifies stakeholders that need to work...
together to achieve minimal use of antimicrobials including government, professional organisations (including in human health), research organisations, relevant industries, and the animal production and education sectors.

Dr Steve Merchant, Chair of the NZVA Antimicrobial Resistance Strategy Group says the veterinary profession has a “professional, regulatory and moral responsibility” to promote the appropriate use of medicines in animals.

“Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) is a complex problem which poses future challenges to animal health and welfare such as the inability to control infectious diseases. It also has the potential to undermine access to export markets for our animal products, as consumers increasingly express concerns about the use of antibiotics in animals. Our AMR vision will support the Government’s goal to double the value of exports by 2025.”

The NZVA strongly supports MPI’s consultation to progress an MPI AMR direction statement (with broad industry partnerships), as well as moves by the Ministry of Health to develop a strategic AMR plan for New Zealand.

“When we launched our AMR vision last year it certainly had people talking, but most importantly it’s been a catalyst for change,” says Dr Merchant. “We’re very encouraged to see a growing commitment to address AMR and recognition that we need an overarching, government-led strategy. It’s one of our greatest global health challenges, and we need to act urgently.”

“The March issue of VetScript, the NZVA’s monthly publication, includes a feature story by journalist Matt Philp that delves into the thinking behind the NZVA’s aspirational statement and the analysis by PwC in its report, “Antibiotic Resistance: Challenges and Opportunities.”

Government funding targets exports and the environment

The Government has committed just under $100 million in funding to boost primary sector production and reduce the country’s environmental footprint. The Our Land and Water National Science Challenge will deliver new ideas, technologies and systems for primary production while also improving land and water management, says Science and innovation Minister Steven Joyce. Initial research will include identifying pollution in soil and water to make better land management decisions; developing ‘next generation’ farming systems to deliver high profits with low environmental impact; and developing new technologies such as drones and precision agriculture.

Animal shelter: a cornerstone of welfare and wellbeing

Adequate shelter to protect animals from very hot or cold weather is a cornerstone of animal welfare and on farm productivity. Recent media coverage has shown farm animals exposed to the hot sun.

NZVA Head of Veterinary Services Dr Callum Irvine says that greater public scrutiny of farming practices is having a positive effect on animal wellbeing.

booster for farmers and veterinarians, but El Nino is not over yet. Its effects are expected to endure well into autumn and winter. In the upcoming March VetScript magazine veterinarians provide key advice on coping with El Nino for the remainder of the year.
“We are increasingly being asked to consider the degree with which we accept practices that meet minimum standards but fall short of the expectations that the public hold in how animals should be treated. The veterinary profession plays a key role in ensuring that we have the highest possible wellbeing of animals under our care.”

Dr Irvine says that the vast majority of farmers take good care of their animals and understand that stressed and poorly cared for animals have lower productivity.

Minimum standards and recommended best practices for animal shelter are currently covered in legislation, such as animal codes of welfare. Dr Irvine says that the Ministry for Primary Industries is considering legislative changes to strengthen shelter requirements, including enforceable regulations.

Practical on-farm solutions are also being recommended to primary producers, for example in the dairy industry this includes grazing cows close to a dairy shed to reduce walking distance, installing sprinklers and shade sails in milking sheds which could also be used in calf yards, a change to once a day milking, and improved access to water to normalise animal body temperatures.

President of NZVA Dairy Cattle Branch, Jenny Weston, interviewed in Dairy Nova, said shade should be provided wherever possible to prevent heat stress. “Given the predictions for more abrupt climate change and more extremes, farmers should be starting to think about putting in shade if they don’t have it – planting it now so it will be there in 12-15 years.”

She recommended cooling cows using sprinklers when they are in the collecting yard and fans in the shed if possible.