Veterinary Surveillance Strategy

NOTE OF PILOT VETERINARY SENTINEL NETWORK (CATTLE) MEETING

ASKHAM BRYAN, YORK

23 January 2007

Further copies of this report can be obtained from Surveillance, Zoonoses and Emerging Issues Division, Defra, Area 611, 1A Page Street, London, SW1P 4PQ, or email vetsurveillance@defra.gsi.gov.uk
Sentinel Network Meeting
Askham Bryan College
23 January 2007

Attendees
Adam Hurn   Bainbridge Vets
Jonathan Statham  Bishopton Vet Group
Chris Green   CJ Green
Andrew Knox   Clevedale Vet Practice
Colin Harrison  Cross Green Veterinary Centre
Tim Wittrick   DA & DT Wittrick
Graham Barlow  Forest House Vets
Gemma Smith   Howells Vet Surgery
Hilary Vayro   Kebir House Veterinary Practice
Jonathan Stockton  Kingsway Veterinary Group
Andrew Schofield  Minster Vet Practice
Julian Norton  Skeldale Vet Centre
Richard Philips  Swale Vet Surgery
Mark Webster   Wilton House Vet Clinic
Neil Roberts  Dalehead Veterinary Group
Howard Best  Linscott & Best Veterinary Surgeons
Alison Burns  Portland House Veterinary Group
Nick Preston  Preston & Bramley
Alan McCormack Rae, Bean & Partners
David Logue  Glasgow Vet School
David Catlow  BVA President

Three participating farmers

Liz Kelly       Overall project coordinator & project manager for VSN - Pigs (Surveillance, Zoonoses & Emerging Issues Division, (SZEID) Defra)
Ruth Lysons     Head of Surveillance, Zoonoses & Emerging Issues Division, (SZEID)
Jane Gibbens    Project epidemiologist (SZEID)
Kay Williams    Veterinary Surveillance Strategy quality assurance manager (SZEID)
Lesley Larkin   Cattle Veterinary Adviser, (SZEID)
Claire Lansdown  VSN project support (SZEID)
Avril Hannam    Veterinary Officer, State Veterinary Service (SVS) Leeds
Andrew Chirkowski  Veterinary Officer, State Veterinary Service (SVS) Leeds
Kate Sharpe    Divisional Veterinary Manager, State Veterinary Service (SVS) Leeds
Judi Ryan      Data Analyst, Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) Weybridge
Gareth Hateley Veterinary Investigation Officer, Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) Thirsk
Non Attendees
Steve Timms   Alma Vet Surgery
William Lockhart  Barr & Lockhart
Neil Fraser   Churchfield Vet Centre
Chris Lockett  Hird & Partners
Roddy Graham Vermuyden Vets
John Watkinson Watkinson JL
Mark Hutchinson Dales Veterinary Centre
Rob Donaldson Donaldson & Partners
K. E Wilson Eastgate Veterinary Centre
Edward Button Mount Veterinary Group
Tom Miller   Stokesley Veterinary Practice

The meeting was the second time that the veterinary surgeons participating in the pilot project had the opportunity to meet as one group.

The day involved gaining feedback from vets, discussing the next stage of the project which will look at practice level data, hearing the results of the surveillance visits, gaining feedback from farmers and looking at regional options for the future.

Administration and vet feedback – Liz Kelly

Farmer attendance at the meeting
Liz discussed the difficulties both in vets agreeing to invite their participating client to the meeting, and in invited farmers agreeing to attend the meeting. There had been some comments that the participating farmers may either be too busy to attend or were not ‘typical’ farmers and so would not be interested or able to contribute feedback. One of the vets who did not have a farm selected for the surveillance visits indicated that if the vet had been able to select which farm joined this pilot more farmers may have been inclined to attend. It was also suggested that farmers may not attend a vets meeting and if a separate farmers meeting was organised more may attend.

One vet indicated that he felt that there would have been more benefits from the pilot if the vet had been able to select the farm where they would have expected disease. Jane indicated that the random selection allowed a view to be taken across the board. If we only measure premises with disease there will be a distorted view. The random selection allows different farms to be selected, the good and the bad, and this will provide an even view of the population. This pilot is testing the practicalities of a sentinel network rather than a measure of disease.
Visits
Liz indicated that it took longer than envisaged to complete all the visits and some of the visits finished six months ago when other visits had only been completed in December 2006. Some reasons were given for this – on one farm visits had been delayed as the cattle were still on the hills until a late stage and therefore there was a long delay between the 2nd and 3rd visits and another vet indicated that he planned his visits when the practice was quiet. He regarded the visits as lower priority as they did not pull money into the practice.

Liz indicated that most of the farms visited had been beef farms. Replacement farms had been based on the size of the farm rather than the same farm type.

Monthly reports
Liz discussed with the group the number of monthly report forms received. Some of the vets indicated that they did not complete the form as they didn't always remember and would have appreciated reminders. Using text message to remind the vets was suggested although others preferred something physical i.e. a fax in their in-tray. Vets were asked for their preference for receiving a reminder:

- Text – 2
- Fax – 7
- Email – 5
- No preference - 2

One vet also indicated that the form was difficult to complete and information had to be trawled through and time had to be spent discussing information with colleagues. There was a struggle in all vets in the practice recording all information especially when the contact was not routine. It was discussed that on a long term basis lay staff would complete this form as one of their monthly tasks.

Change in behaviour
A show of hands was asked for on various questions

- A change in the vets understanding of the farm – 7
- No difference in the vets understanding of the farm – 6

One vet indicated that he had not seen a change in his understanding of the farm as the farm was a well run dairy farm with excellent record keeping and was already operating at a high standard.

- Farmer changed behaviour between visits – 1
This was a dealer who between visits built a new calf house. This has had a welfare benefit. The work would have been done but the sentinel visits spurred it along.

- A benefit to the practice – 1
There is now more dealing with the farm and the vet is now personally dealing with the farm rather than it being any vet from the practice who is available. The relationship with the farmer is now very good.

**Practice level data – Jane Gibbens, Lesley Larkin**

Jane presented information on why the capture of practice level data is seen as useful and gave a brief recap of some of the work that had been done at the last workshop.

Lesley discussed the type of information that could be captured and the various methods for doing so. She presented the results of the small pilot she had conducted with vets in Devon and Warwick. The two vets involved in the pilot in Yorkshire related their views.

Comments below were captured relating to different aspects of data required and methodology.

- Lists containing information on the number of cattle on the farms are potentially incorrect. This information is difficult to capture. If the vet called and asked the farmer each time the information was required the farmer is likely to ask who wants to know.

- For the purpose of the pilot a paper based written submission is the most practical option although this is not satisfactory for a long term basis. Electronic models already available have not been successful so far although there are others in the pipeline at the current time. Caution was urged at using electronic methods at this stage.

- The recording of the information required assumes that the vet is recording diagnoses and this is being transferred onto an accounting system. Recording a visit occurring is easy but it is more difficult to record a diagnosis. A lot of procedures such as foot trimming are recorded as a “time spent on farm” basis for billing rather than as details on number of lame cows seen. This approach to billing has potentially increased with the changes to the prescription medicines legislation and unfortunately complicates attempts to measure disease surveillance data at the practice level. One vet indicated that he could put a coding system on his computer system to record diagnosis. This will take some time to set up but it is the only way to get something realistic and is not based on guess
work. It was agreed that gaining accurate information is going to take a lot of time.

- It was suggested that the day book could be used. One of the vets indicated that the day book does not necessarily indicate what actually happened on the farm.

- An alternative suggestion was using barcodes for diagnosis. 7 vets are already using barcodes within their practice. The Defra team will explore this method further as a long-term option.

- Having one member of lay staff pulling all this information together depends on the practice size and type. The point was raised that if one person in the practice is made responsible for the job generally a better result can be expected.

- Providing a split on antibiotic usage between beef and dairy farms was agreed to be impossible. In some instances differentiation between cattle and other production animals would also be impossible. Monthly medicine usage can also give information.

- Collecting data on an ongoing basis will be difficult. If the information to be collected is very basic the practice could gather the information. It was suggested that basic level information is collected initially and this could be built up over time.

- It was felt that a lot of information was being asked for. The information required needs to be very simple to begin with. General consensus was that getting the practice level data information will be difficult and time-consuming.

- One vet indicated that he has 300 active cattle farms and collecting all the information required will take a long time. The vet suggested that another method would be to send in all the invoices to enable the information to be inputted centrally. These define what the visit was for. Routine visits are just billed on time though and a coding system will be required.

- Jane suggested that for the pilot the vets could be sent a list of information requested and the vet completes what they can in a given amount of time whilst recording how long it took to progress to the next question.

- It was discussed that all the practices have different IT as recording systems so setting up new coding systems is going to take a long time. There is also no understanding at this stage of how large a job this is going to be.
• Consent from farmers will be required if there is a need to link the farmer to the completed form and information. There was a strong feeling that this should be an anonymous system.

• Point made that as collection of this data from the practices will only be done over a 3 month period, any changes to the billing/computer system is not practical for such a short term study. For some practices changes and the insertion of codes into the system would be possible for long term data gathering. For some practices, depending on computer system used and/or amount of reliance on paper records such as the daybook this may not be practical at all.

• The Defra team will be looking into what is possible using the computer/billing system and the various computer systems will be explored with a long term plan in mind over the next few months. In the meantime, for the purposes of this study, collection of the data may take longer than is ideal but, as this is a pilot, participation and recording the data as completely as possible will be appreciated.

• The value of attempting to get practice level data on farms visited and diagnoses made on farm was questioned, specifically regarding the value to the practice of providing this data. Some participants felt that all this work on their part wasn’t really going to prove to be of any value to themselves or their businesses.

**Surveillance Visits – Liz Kelly**

**PM’s**
The information provided from the visits indicated that animals were dying but only 11 PM’s were carried out. The vets indicated that at the smaller farms time is too precious to justify taking the animal to Thirsk. In many cases the farmer knows why the animal died and therefore sees no reason for a PM. One vet also indicated that there is a reluctance to take the animal to the lab as the farmer has not had any success in the past and therefore does not see the benefit on this occasion.

One of the farmers at the meeting indicated that if they know why the animal had died they accept the death. It is only if there is a run of death that they will take action and use the PM service. Another farmer, who did send in an animal for PM, indicated that he wouldn’t have sent the animal in for PM if he was not part of this project. Another farmer indicated that transportation was an issue and he therefore did not use the PM service.

**Lameness**
The lameness element of the study was discussed. David Logue, who carried out the original locomotion scoring training for the vets on the project, indicated
that the results were as expected and farmers will have a better idea over time of lameness on their farm and what to look for. One of the farmers indicated that it has made them look back and they have seen that they may have been accepting some lameness that they shouldn’t have been accepting.

**Ringworm**

One of the farmers indicated that ringworm does not follow a standard pattern. You can go some years with nothing and once ringworm is in one animal you get it in the whole group.

**Quality overview, future work – Kay Williams**

Kay presented some background to the work being done on quality assurance in the Veterinary Surveillance Strategy and discussed some areas of 'lessons learned' from the sentinel pilot, both from the participating vets and Defra.

- Most of the vets had read the guidance notes and the notes on the forms. However it would have been easier if the guidance notes, where possible, had been incorporated onto the forms.
- About half of the vets had read the clinical case definitions.
- Most of the vets had looked at the process diagram and thought the diagram was helpful and saved them from reading a lot of information.
- The vets did not want the process diagram laminated.
- Many of the vets had easy access to the internet and agreed that the forms could be placed on the website and be printed off when required.
- The vets indicated that feedback on their completed forms would be helpful. One vet indicated that it is nice to receive a telephone call to indicate that the form has arrived and receive feedback at the same time.
- One vet indicated that errors should be logged and these should be fed back to the vet.
- Noted that there was some ambiguity in some of the form questions which need to be addressed.

**Visits, vet and farmer feedback – Liz Kelly**

Feedback was sought on the practicalities of carrying out the work, both from the vet and farmer viewpoint. Liz and Jane discussed their experiences of accompanying vets on surveillance visits. Feedback from vets:

- The clinical inspections were believed to be accurate when carried out indoors – more problems when cattle were out with regard to weather and being able to observe moving targets.
- Discharges – what are you going to do with that information? Wouldn’t this information to base trends be better from a research project?
- If there is a need to get the cows in for specific checks it will be done.
- We get on and do what we are told (when asked why the impracticality of observing stock at pasture has not been reported).
• We already put up with a lot i.e. doing TB testing.

The vets were asked to think and feedback any further results that they would like to see.

Some thoughts on potential benefits – to the vet, the farmer and to Government (that is the public/wider society) were presented on slides and discussed. Two additional suggestions were made:

**Benefits**

To Government (by Government we mean wider society):

- Helps to maintain a veterinary presence in remote areas, provides surveillance, builds relationships and helps remote practices survive.
- Looks ahead to a presence in the future.

**Regional options – a way forwards – Kate Sharpe**

Kate presented information on regional initiatives set up in Yorkshire under the Animal Health and Welfare Strategy. These included farm health planning (FHP) and action on specific diseases such as sheep scab. They involved collaboration with a number of different bodies and organisations. Several further points were made in the discussion afterwards.

- The vets indicated that they were committed to the way forwards as shown by their involvement in this project and presence at the meetings.
- David Catlow (BVA) indicated that there is a mind set to change and Defra’s interest is a key opportunity to spread the FHP benefits message, everyone has now heard about FHP.
- There is a momentum at the moment but not all farms and veterinary practices are driven to spend all hours striving to make more.
- The vets at the meeting discussed Yorkshire heritage, their strong local and regional identity and partnership working to use this identity to help the farming community.

**Next steps – Jane Gibbens**

- Lesley will distribute the baseline questionnaire in the next few weeks.
- The practicalities of the monthly questionnaire will be looked at.
- Lesley will be in touch to explore a possible base pack and optional pack.
- Monthly practice level data for February (if practical in the timescale), March, April and May to be collected.
- By the autumn a complete report for the project will be produced.
- A summary of what we have learnt and feedback will be distributed.

Note prepared by Claire Lansdown and Liz Kelly