

First state-of-nation cattle health and welfare report calls for radical improvements in data

The first ever 'State-of-the-Nation' report on cattle health and welfare in Great Britain, launched today (4 September) at Livestock 2012 by the industry's Cattle Health and Welfare Group (CHAWG), challenges industry and government to 'get its act together' on data quality and consistency.

The report provides the most complete snapshot to date of health and welfare in both dairy and beef sectors in Great Britain. The group's chair Tim Brigstocke says the document – which covers subjects ranging from Bovine Viral Diarrhoea to fertility, Johne's Disease and nutrition – heralds significant progress in establishing a baseline for the cattle industry, but highlights a number of urgent issues.

"This is a major step forward and credit is due to the organisations involved," he says, drawing attention to advancements in herd health planning and breeding goals, as well as measures to control Johne's Disease and mastitis, all of which have resulted in tangible improvements in cattle health in recent years.

"But there are many areas in which we need to improve, such as mortality in youngstock and lameness in dairy cattle – although it's pleasing that the report highlights recent significant efforts to address these," points out Mr Brigstocke.

"However, data remains the main hurdle to us moving forward as quickly as we'd like, and is the main reason this report has been so long in coming. There are large gaps in availability and consistency of current and geographical data across GB, and there is considerably more information available for dairy cattle than for beef herds."

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He says consistency could be improved by creating a standard template when recording the various regional activities; private companies operating in the industry could also pool information pre-competitively. Furthermore, a number of potential sources of useful information remain untapped.

“The Cattle Tracing System (CTS) of the British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS), the National Fallen Stock Company, and the abattoir data collected by what was the Meat Hygiene Service (now part of the Food Standards Agency) are the three most obvious. We need to resolve this issue over data; until we do so, the industry will struggle to confidently quantify both levels of challenge and improvements in performance.”

The report has been welcomed by the chief veterinary officers (CVOs) within Britain. CVO of the UK Nigel Gibbens commented: “Cattle Health and Welfare has perhaps never been more important. Profitability is increasingly hard for cattle keepers to achieve, retailers and consumers are rightly concerned about the care of the animals that produce their food, and efficient production is one of the many things needed to help avoid the worst impacts of climate change.”

The report is available to download from www.chawg.org.uk, via the EBLEX website.

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Notes to editors

1. A launch press briefing is being held 10.10am – 10.40am, in The Media Centre Briefing Room on Tuesday, 4 September at Livestock 2012. Speaking at the launch are: Tim Brigstocke, Chair of CHAWG; Christianne Glossop, Chief Veterinary Officer of Wales; Carl Padgett, President of the British Veterinary Association; Derrick Davies, Council Member of the RABDF and farm manager
2. The secretariat of CHAWG is kindly funded by DairyCo and EBLEX.
3. The organisations forming CHAWG are (alphabetically): Animal Health & Veterinary Laboratories Agency; Animal Health & Welfare Board of England; Animal Health Distributors Association; British Cattle Veterinary Association; Defra; Farmers Union of Wales; Holstein UK; National Beef Association; NFU (England and Wales); NFU Scotland; National Office of Animal Health; Red Tractor Assurance; RSPCA; Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers; Royal Veterinary College; Scottish Government; and Welsh Government. CHAWG would like to thank these for their efforts, as well as the many other industry bodies and private companies who supplied data.