

RABDF/FARM HEALTH MANGAGEMENT AWARDS 2011

Sponsored by Metacam for Cattle

APPLICATION FORM

Please complete and return this form to Miss Emily Rowley, The Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers, Dairy House, Unit 31, Abbey Park, Stareton, Kenilworth, Warwickshire, CV8 2LY by **24th June 2011**

NAME OF COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY/ VET SCHOOL:

LECTURER'S CONTACT NAME:

(PLEASE PRINT)

POSITION:

TELEPHONE NO:

EMAIL:

The following person has been selected as one of the two best Students for the above College/University/Vet School and will be able to attend the 2011 Dairy Event and Livestock Show should their essay be among the finalists.

FULL NAME OF STUDENT:

*** CONTACT ADDRESS:**

*** TELEPHONE NO:**

*** EMAIL:**

*** MOBILE NO:**

DATE OF BIRTH:

** Please supply contact details where student can be contacted during July/August 2011*

PLEASE REMEMBER: EACH ESSAY MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY AN APPLICATION FORM AND RECEIVED BY RABDF NO LATER THAN **24th JUNE 2011**

SIGNED:

(Lecturer)

TITLE:

RABDF/FARM HEALTH MANAGEMENT AWARDS 2011
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Outline of the competition rules and deadlines

1. The competition will be open to agricultural and veterinary students from any course year.
2. The competition will take the form of an essay of not more than 1500 words.
3. Remit for the essay:
 - Proactive farm health management is a key element of the Defra/industry Animal Health and Welfare Strategy
 - It has been demonstrated that a proactive approach to health management brings benefits to animal health and welfare and farm business profitability.
 - Whilst cattle farmers are obliged to have a herd health plan for assurance schemes, most farmers do not take a proactive approach to farm health management.
 - The essay should demonstrate that the author:

Both sets of students

- Understands the cost of disease and the financial impact of disease on business performance
- Can define the meaning of a team approach and quantify the benefit
- Understands the environmental effects of disease and also the likely impact on the quality of meat and milk being produced for human consumption.

For veterinary students the essays should also:

- Show an approach to overcome a farmer client's resistance to proactive health planning
- Demonstrate the longer term benefits to the delivery of veterinary services and to the client's business when proactive health management is practised.

For agricultural students the essays should also:

- Show the approach the author would take to improving the health and welfare status of the following farm case study, recognising that the financial position of the business is weak and there are no additional funds available for capital improvements.

Farm case study

Mr A keeps 120 pedigree Holsteins plus followers on a 95 hectare mainly grass farm in the Chepstow area. The farm borders a public road and two adjacent cattle farms. There is one employee and cows are cubicle housed and milked through a 28/14 herringbone parlour. Some heifer calves are reared as replacements with others being bought in as necessary. Replacement rate of the milking herd runs at 25% per year. Farm income is from the sale of milk and cull cows.

Performance: 7,200 litres/cow on 2.2 tons of concentrate with a calving interval of 415 days.

Disease status: Bulk milk cell count is averaging 240,000/ml and mastitis cases are estimated at 70 per 100 cows per year. Lameness cases are predominantly due to digital dermatitis but incidence is not measured. There is no history of TB in the herd, but there is current evidence BVD and a history of IBR. There is also a suspicion of Johnes Disease.

4. Selection of the submitted essays rests entirely with each College or Vet School concerned. Please send the best two essays with completed application forms to the RABDF to arrive no later than **24th June 2011**.
5. Judging of the essays will be undertaken by a panel chosen from RABDF and the BCVA. There will be two winning essays; one by an agricultural student and one by a veterinary student.
6. Finalists will be invited to the award ceremony which will take place at the Dairy Event and Livestock Show, on **Tuesday 6th/Wednesday 7th September 2011**.
7. The winning students will receive a plaque provided by Metacam for Cattle and a £500 cash prize. A contribution towards all finalists' expenses will also be made.
8. We do not accept any responsibility for late or lost entries due to the internet or postal service.
9. It is the entrant's responsibility to ensure that all the necessary permissions are obtained from people featured or discussed in an article.
10. The Sponsor, the FHP Partnership and the RABDF reserve the right to publicly display all entries and to publish any images or entries to promote Farm Health Planning, the RABDF, the Sponsor and/or the competition.
11. The judges' decision will be final and no correspondence can be entered into.
12. By entering, entrants will be deemed to have agreed to be bound by these rules.

Emily Rowley
Administrator of the Farm Health Planning Award

A thoughtfully constructed herd health plan can be an invaluable tool in running a stock farm to its full productive potential. Although a plan is often first put together to correct current problems, health planning by its very nature looks forward and so at its best should intercept potential issues before a production loss or welfare compromise has occurred.

Whilst many farms do have health plans, they are commonly considered inconveniences that have to be completed to comply with farm assurance schemes. This results in blueprint health plans that are a waste of time and effort – vets have a role to play in offering their services in such a way as to encourage a proactive, motivated approach that capitalises on the potential gains of health planning. Practices must make a commitment to this from the outset, and set aside time to do it properly rather than fitting it in around other duties.

Key areas that could (and generally should) be covered in a health plan are outlined in box 1. Analysis of previous performance (based on the most accurate records available) and consideration of the actual potential of the herd should allow realistic and relevant production targets to be set. This will necessitate establishment of policies to ensure nothing interferes with progress towards these targets, e.g. biosecurity protocols, and routine vaccination and anthelmintic plans.

Priorities will differ on different farms – the main production limiting factors should be addressed first. Selecting two or three manageable targets will be more effective than attempting a complete overhaul immediately. On annual review, targets can be adjusted and re-prioritised in accordance with the previous years performance.

- Details of farm
- Current production data (based on the most accurate data available)
- Production targets (bearing in mind previous and potential performance)
- Reproductive performance (e.g. fertility rates, calving/lambing percentages)
- Nutritional management (consider regular condition scoring and use of metabolic profiles, involve a nutritional advisor)
- Replacement policy (e.g. how replacements are sourced if an open system)
- Disease control (tailor for the particular problems of the farm in question).
- Control of infectious disease (current status and monitoring procedures, vaccination policies)
- Parasite control (routine treatment protocols and grazing management)
- Neonatal care (routine management and procedures)

Box 1. Information from Alistair Macrae (RDSVS farm animal course 2009-2010)

The main barriers to proactive health planning differ with region and individual, but commonly boil down to perceived cost, worry about the time/labour involved and inefficient record keeping. In Morayshire for example, key problems include:

- Many relatively small farms with narrow profit margins, where paying for veterinary time in the absence of an identifiable problem seems counter intuitive
- Many farms have a small work force that is already stretched
- Extensive beef systems with poor handling facilities makes the idea of extra handling (e.g. for regular body condition scoring) problematic
- Traditional attitudes in the farming community often don't recognise the potential benefits of health planning

Despite the above, farmers in the area are generally open minded to new ideas provided there is an actual potential gain. The initial marketing of health planning is therefore key. It shouldn't be portrayed as a requirement for an assurance scheme, but as a service being offered to improve the efficiency of veterinary involvement on farm and overall production. This is more likely to generate commitment to the plan as an ongoing project rather than seeing it as something that can be rushed through and forgotten. **When promoting health planning, vets should:**

- Consider holding an evening meeting, inviting clients to hear about the basics of what health planning has to offer on an informal social basis. This would help get a foot in the door.
- In initial health planning meetings with individuals
 - o Go to the farm rather than have the client come in to the practice to show the scheme is being taken seriously by the practice and ensure access to all information necessary to generate an appropriate plan
 - o Be prepared, with figures on the costs of treating diseases versus the cost of preventing them to illustrate potential savings. Know what is relevant on that farm, e.g. don't emphasize lameness if mastitis is the bigger issue.
- Charge appropriately – the fee must be sufficient to enable the vet to put in the necessary time and effort, but not excessive so as to make the health plan a failure in what will generally be viewed as its main aim – financial gain for the farmer.
 - o Consider working out a farm specific flat fee that includes time put into the health plan itself, visits made and products used as stated in the plan, and visits to individual sick animals (with drugs charged on top). This makes the health

plan central to the veterinary service, ensures the vet is closely involved year round and makes the financial aspect as transparent as possible. It also may mean that calls to sick animals come sooner, warding off bigger problems at a herd level. Although the fee may sound high initially, many farmers would appreciate having a handle on overall vet's costs for the year and being able to plan accordingly.

- Consider discounting products used as stated in the health plan, e.g. vaccines and anthelmintics (comparatively reducing the overall fee).

Having got people on board, the plan must be generated such that there is a positive result in the first year – a tangible benefit (however small) should generate trust in the vet and further commitment to proactive health planning. To this end, the plan should be realistic and relevant:

- Prioritise production limiting factors and make appropriate targets – don't try to do too much at once, and ensure that it is possible to improve in the areas identified
- Ensure the requirements of the plan are feasible – e.g. it may be ideal to body condition score at housing, turnout, calving and service, but it is likely to be more achievable to timetable the task to fit in with other routine tasks such as vaccination
- Ensure the plan provides for the vet to stay closely involved on farm – consider having a planned visit at key times, e.g. at bulling to view the breeding stock. This could be co-ordinated with other tasks such as cutting calves.
- Consider offering quarterly meetings for health plan clients– this may involve giving advice on topical problems and an opportunity for any questions

Find ways to make using the plan easy – if information must be searched for or paperwork is arduous it is unlikely to be adhered to.

- Consider how the key points of the plan could be visualised as a calendar
 - A system such as the one illustrated in figure 1 is easy to use, doesn't contain unnecessary information and allows for forward planning for the next month.
- Have a system at the practice such that the routine products stated in the health plan are delivered to the farm automatically at the appropriate time so the farmer doesn't have to worry about ordering and picking up

- Make sure record keeping is straightforward and relevant. In some systems there will already be detailed records in place (e.g. fertility and milk record data for dairy herds). At some smaller beef farms, there is often only the bare minimum of data available
 - o Tailor to the client
 - If comfortable with computers, could set up an ongoing spreadsheet to accumulate data throughout the year
 - Could suggest a simple tally system for records most relevant to the targets, e.g. for the number of instances of a particular disease. This could be tabulated below the calendar summary of the health plan, ensuring the information is readily accessible at the year end.

At the end of the year, performance analysis should enable appropriate planning for the following year. Ensure the events of the previous year are easily to visualise - graphical representations of production figures and disease incidence may make it easier to spot trends and associations and allows for easy year on year comparisons.

In summary, many of the barriers to successful health planning (especially in a relatively traditional area such as Morayshire) are due to an underestimation of their potential benefits and misconceptions as to the work and costs involved. Presentation of health planning as a package designed to improve productivity and efficiency is critical in encouraging the necessary enthusiasm to make it work. Having generated interest, it is vital to ensure clients remain committed and proactive by having sensible, achievable plans relevant to the unit in question and staying involved year round. The first year will be the hardest – if constructed thoughtfully, a good health plan should produce results that themselves ensure continued commitment and progress in subsequent years.

Acknowledgements:

Information used from RDSVS farm animal course staff 2009-2010,, specifically

- *Julie Forrest MRCVS*
- *Alistair Macrae MRCVS*
- *Colin Penny MRCVS*
- *Dr Neil Sargison MRCVS*

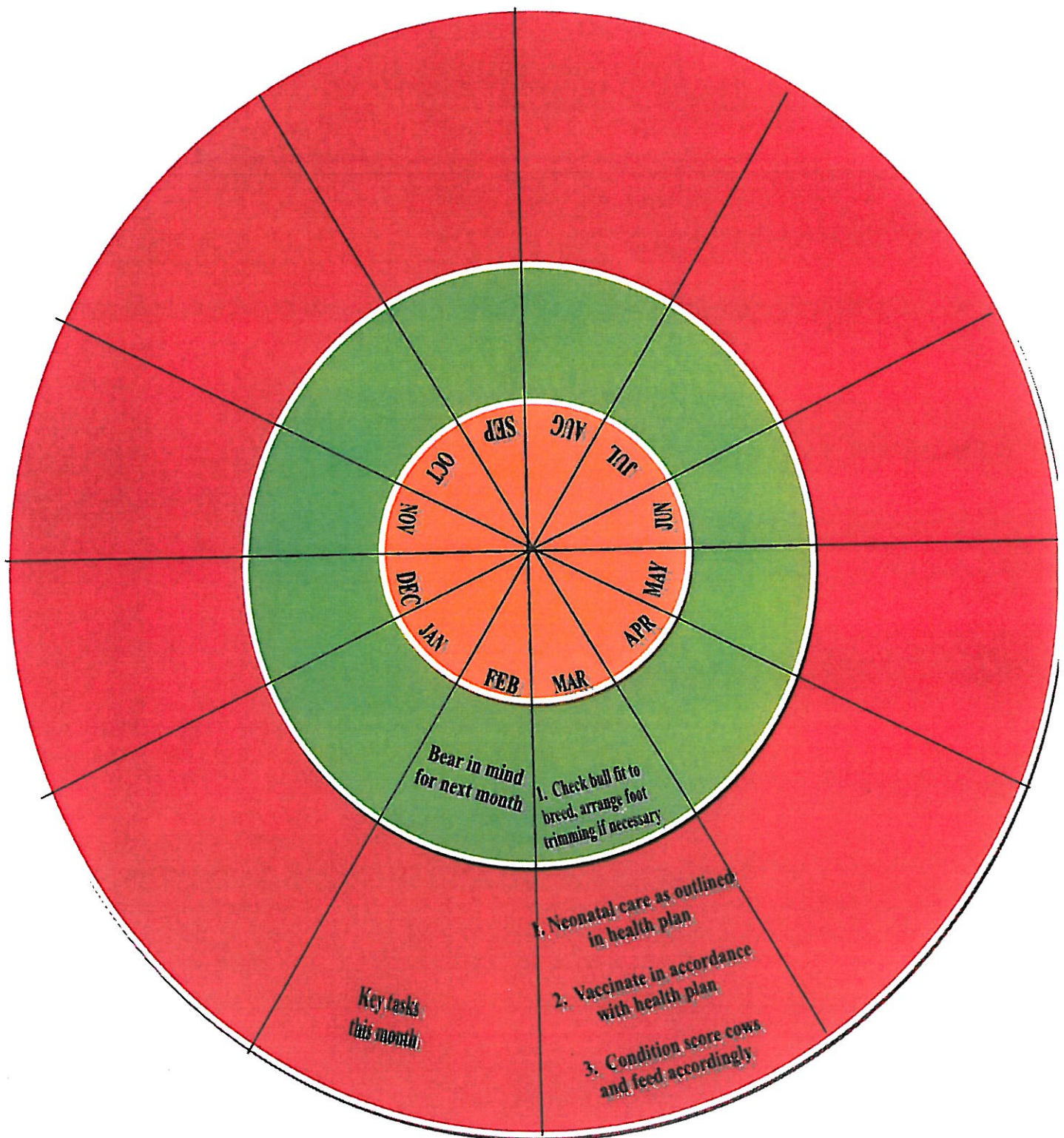


Fig 1. A system such as this allows the year to be looked at as a whole, and breaks down important events by the month. Important things to note might include dates for routine treatments such as vaccinations, the start/finish dates of the breeding period, periods during which body condition scoring should take place etc. Rotating the chart as you move through the year means that the information relevant to the time of year is obvious, and key dates/points of the health plan for the rest of the year are also easily accessible.