



## MARKETING VETERINARY SKILLS FOR ON-FARM QUALITY ASSURANCE

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### **Introductory comments**

My brief in preparing this paper is how vets should market their skills for on-farm Quality Assurance. Before addressing the subject I would like to make some general observations. My comments are those of a deer farmer rather than one wearing any political hat.

I regard my vets as skilled members of my management team, ranked alongside my staff, family, farm consultant and professional advisors. We are all part of a team.

I am not interested in the fire-engine approach to animal health. Prevention planning and targets to avoid the cliff face problems is money well spent. We still need fast, efficient service for the problems, but we would spend as much time talking the issues through to avoid the falling through the cracks. I am more interested in the vets' prognosis of the problem and use the post-mortem lab results as a back-up to the skilled professional advice.

We plan our vet visits around our seasonal demands, and aim to make the best use of the technical skills during the two-monthly visits. We now have a written report after each session and I now give my Manager and staff more exposure to the vets and time to talk through the management issues of the day. We are an hour away from the clinic.

You do not market your skills well - there is an impression out there that your job is to be on hand at crisis time, to do post-mortems, handle calving, lambing and fawning problems - and such mundane tasks as pregnancy testing, ram testing and now, dare I say it, TB testing. To earn the bulk of the fees from that area and then expect clients to be loyal, purchase all their animal health products from the practice where the marketing skills and/or advice feature round the highest margin products, is expecting too much.

Thank goodness I don't deal with that sort of vet, and I doubt if any are in this audience. However misplaced you may think those remarks are, many farmers have that view of vets. It is a question of how you market your skills and what basis you visit your clients.

### **Quality Assurance (Q.A.)**

Many farmers are suspicious that Q.A. is a method (instituted by bureaucrats and managers) of extracting another slice of their hard-earned cash. You will be aware Q.A. must be seen and promoted.

- 1 Without any compulsion - needs to be networked through progressive farmers Needs to be highlighted at field days
- 2 Must be linked to profit improvement - a good example is the dramatic reduction in hide damage after the introduction of the Deer Transport Code
- 3 Should be part of the planned animal health programme where you are part of the overall management strategy, not just seen as another attack on the farmer's ability to do things properly
- 4 Needs to be linked in with velvet harvest training and accreditation, on-farm Q A , T B Q A
- 5 Related to better understanding of animal welfare issues and safe-guarding our future markets
- 6 At the end of the day we here are all part of the loop and this is, I hope, like preaching to the converted, but we all have to realise that there are a greater numbers of farmers who just want to get on with their job, enjoy their farming without any interference of intrusion