



Image: Piglets on the Moredun farm



Scholarship

2013 Winners

An examination of current attitudes towards the threat of Schmallenberg virus within the Scottish farming community

MARY FRASER (LECTURER IN ENVIRONMENTAL BIOLOGY & VETERINARY NURSING - EDINBURGH NAPIER UNIVERSITY)

“More work is needed to assess and improve the methods used for information dispersal to ensure that both farmers and smallholders have the most up to date scientific information available to them to make informed decisions about the care of their animals.”



Schmallenberg virus (SBV) was first reported in Germany in 2011. Since then it has spread across Europe with cases reported throughout all parts of the UK. The impact of notifiable diseases such as Foot and Mouth, on the farming economy is well documented, both in terms of finance and human well-being. However, there are other lower profile diseases which also have an impact on the farming industry such as BVD, Johne’s, Toxoplasma and now Schmallenberg. SBV has only been found in a few locations in Scotland therefore farmers need to balance the risk of the disease spreading here with the costs of vaccination or not undertaking any preventative measures.

The aim of this project was to evaluate the current attitude of the farming community in Scotland to the threat of SBV and the willingness to carry out vaccination. It is hoped that this information can then be used to raise awareness of the pressures which emerging diseases have on farmers / smallholders both as individuals and as small businesses.

Establishing animal health priorities for livestock farmers in rural Haiti

ELLIE MILNES (VETERINARY SURGEON – VETERINARY ENTERPRISES GROUP, NZ)

“The qualitative questionnaire data showed that farmers were interested in the health of their animals, and that they were keen to participate in improvement and education programmes. This should be a key area of focus for NGOs working in the area.”



Agriculture is one of the key drivers to sustainable rural development. The welfare and livelihood of farmers is intrinsically linked to the health and welfare of their livestock, and animal health status is an important constraint to poverty alleviation. Haiti is one of the poorest countries in the world, and livestock farming has been identified as a ‘pathway out of poverty’ for impoverished rural families.

The aim of this pilot study was to establish a baseline of animal health data for Haitian livestock in order to guide future research and sustainable agricultural development. Field work was carried out in the Cap Haitien region of northern Haiti in June 2014. Data were collected from farmers and their animals attending low-cost livestock health clinics in three villages, and full clinical examinations were performed on every animal. A total of 145 farmers attended clinic days, of which 23 were randomly selected for semi-structured interviews. A local community animal health worker was also interviewed.

Assessing sustainable low-input small ruminant management practices employed in Greece and their potential application by UK sheep and goat producers

CLARE PHYTHIAN & MARGIT GROENEVELT
(VETERINARY STUDENTS, UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL)

“As well as being of great personal benefit for professional training and career development, this experience has been invaluable for advice and approaches to flock health planning and the assessment of nutrition and housing design.”



A study tour of sheep and goat farms across Northern and Central Greece was developed. The main aims of this study tour were:

- To undertake specialist small ruminant health and production training as a core component of the ECSRHM diploma training requirements.
- To examine whether sustainable low-input management practices employed by producers in Greece could be applied by the UK small ruminant livestock industry.
- To develop research contacts and training networks and identify potential research collaborations with the Aristotle University, Thessaloniki, Greece.

A total of 13 farms were visited, as well as three milk processing units and the research and teaching facilities of the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine of Aristotle University.

Mixed swards – the more species the merrier?

MICHAEL BLANCHE (FARMER, PERTH)

“My aim is to limit cash spend and make my forage provide what bags, buckets, drenches, wormers, boluses and injections can but in a more effective way. Most of all I want my sheep to thrive, to be blissfully happy, to be truly healthy again and for mixed swards to be a sustainable, low cost way of achieving these targets.”



Sward species diversity has the potential to provide the ultimate in rumen function, contributing not just energy and protein but also fibre, condensed tannins and trace elements.

The vision of dairy cows on beautiful ryegrass swards producing liquid dung should make one question whether the grazing diet we all aspire to might be flawed. Is our mono-cultural grazing – despite its high cost and input – under-performing? Health problems are common place, parasites flourishing, and trace elements are still lacking. The aim of this project was to research whether there could be a better alternative to mono-cultural grazing.