

BVA response to the Vet Sustain draft strategy

17 January 2020

1. The British Veterinary Association (BVA) is the national representative body for the veterinary profession in the United Kingdom. With over 18,000 members, our primary aim is to represent, support and champion the interests of the United Kingdom's veterinary profession. We therefore take a keen interest in all issues affecting the profession, including animal health and welfare, food production, public health, regulatory issues and employment matters.
2. The veterinary professions are an integral part of the sustainability agenda, working collaboratively with others to protect animals, people, and the environment they share. Veterinary surgeons, RVNs, and the wider vet-led team provide preventive healthcare and treatment for companion animals and livestock, carry out health monitoring and disease surveillance, promote high animal health and welfare and the responsible use of medicines, protect public health, and optimise food productivity and sustainability. We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Vet Sustain draft strategy.

Vision and Mission

3. We support the Vet Sustain vision for the veterinary profession to be a leading force for sustainability. Having recognised the need to prioritise sustainability we have, in recent years, included 'Sustainability and One Health' as one of the key areas on which we focus our limited policy and campaigning resources. We have:
 - Published our position '[UK sustainable animal agriculture](#)', a recommendation from our 2016 [Animal Welfare Strategy](#), which calls for animal welfare to be recognised as a key sustainability objective and acknowledges and seeks to address the increasing recognition that animal agriculture can be a significant contributor to environmental degradation, climate change, habitat loss, and waste.
 - Continued to develop the One Health Coordination Group, a recommendation from the Vet Futures project, which fosters collaboration between veterinary and human health professionals and environmental organisations, and in advance of One Health Day 2019 published our [One Health In Action report](#).
 - Committed to developing guidance on sustainability in veterinary practice and executing a #GreenTeamVet communications plan to raise awareness.
 - Responded to the [EFRA Committee Agriculture and Net-Zero Greenhouse Gas Emissions call for written evidence](#)
 - Responded to the [Defra National Food Strategy](#)

As such we warmly welcome the Vet Sustain initiative and the commitment of the Steering Group to promoting the delivery of positive ethical, environmental, and economic impacts to society so that we can work in a complementary way, collaborating where appropriate, to achieve maximum impact. We would like to see explicit recognition of the wider [vet-led team](#) within the Vet Sustain mission through reference to the veterinary professions, which includes veterinary nursing.

Focus issues

4. We support the proposed focus issues outlined in the draft strategy. As there is clearly an enormous amount of cross-over with a wide range of our existing positions and ongoing activity, we look forward to close liaison in order to avoid duplication of effort and with a view to maximising resources.
5. We would also like to take this opportunity to caution against allowing the Vet Sustain Facebook groups to become an outlet for those who would wish to see citizens eliminating animal-derived products from their diets completely. We are aware of some individuals who are choosing, via the Facebook group, to overstate the role of animal agriculture in climate change and environmental degradation and there is a risk that this will alienate key stakeholders within the profession and more widely, inevitably negatively impacting on the ability of Vet Sustain to gain traction and achieve real change. Such an approach

drastically oversimplifies the role of animal agriculture in delivering positive environmental outcomes such as improved soil health and water management, protection and conservation of wild species, as well as the cultivation of habitats and biodiversity.

6. We are encouraging the veterinary profession to promote the benefits of sustainable consumption, coupled with properly valuing quality animal-derived products, where quality encompasses good animal health and welfare, food safety, environmental protection and fair returns for producers. We are promoting the principle of eating “less and better”, a concept which sees some citizens directing this spend towards higher health and welfare products. Retention of proportional spend is key to ensuring that producers are rewarded for the food they are producing, and incentivises high animal health and welfare, as well as environmental standards within production systems. We have produced a [position on farm assurance schemes](#) with seven guiding principles to assist members and the wider public to understand how farm assurance schemes promote higher animal health and welfare, as well as the [BVA #ChooseAssured: UK Farm Assurance Schemes Infographic](#) to aid the public in their purchasing choices of high health and welfare products.

Action Plan

7. We broadly support the action plan as a pragmatic approach to the achievement of the stated aims of Vet Sustain. The action plan could usefully include a section which identifies key stakeholders within the professions, the pharmaceutical industry, and more widely, including government at a devolved and UK level. It may also be useful to look at sustainability research and initiatives in human healthcare.
8. The plan must be underpinned by appropriate and sustainable resources in order to deliver on the listed objectives. We would be interested to better understand how Vet Sustain plan to approach funding in the short, medium, and longer term.
9. We note that the current Vet Sustain invitation for individuals to pledge support for a call for the global veterinary profession to declare a climate emergency is not covered in the action plan. We are yet to be convinced that this represents the best use of resources when, as recognised by Vet Sustain, the world’s scientific community has already declared such an emergency. Our preference would be for Vet Sustain to simply ‘recognise’ the emergency in any public facing statements, and focus efforts on developing the veterinary profession’s response through the development of practical advice and resources to support the veterinary professions to make changes at a personal and workplace level with a view to fostering sustainable practices.
10. In conclusion, we broadly support the principles of Vet Sustain and commend the combined efforts of the Steering Group members to take steps to bring the sustainability agenda to the forefront of veterinary activity and sphere of influence. We remain keen to engage and look forward to collaborating where appropriate.