Quo Vadis Flemish Swine Practitioner?

Barriers and incentives for the evolution towards an advisory role

RojO Gimeno C.1,2, Dewulf J.J, Loncke D.1, Wauters E.1

1 Social Sciences Unit, Flanders Research Institute for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, ILVO, Belgium, 2Veterinary Epidemiology Unit, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Ghent University, Belgium

Aims

1 Set the scene of the current Flemish swine health advisory system
2 Identify the key actors of the current health advisory system and their role
3 Pinpoint potential integrative solutions to stimulate the sale of veterinary advice to farmers

Motivation

• Advice provided by swine veterinarians plays a key role to optimizing and improving the health status of pig farms
• Currently veterinarians charge indirectly advice with the sale of products and/or veterinary acts
• This situation represents a challenge which may lead to sub-optimal pig health

What we did and how we did it

1. Qualitative open interviews were performed with key informants of the Flemish pig sector (n=7)
2. We performed semi-structured interviews (n=22) with all relevant actors to investigate practices, attitudes and barriers that impede changes to the health advisory system
3. We used thematic analysis to analyze the interviews

Summary of sort and number of interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewees</th>
<th>Vets</th>
<th>Farmers</th>
<th>Salesmen</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Flemish</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWV</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEED</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIN</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scheme of the present Swine Health Advisory System which includes the different kinds of advisors, their linkages and way of getting paid

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pig farmer</th>
<th>Pig herd</th>
<th>Pigs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Herd veterinarian</td>
<td>Feed mill veterinarian</td>
<td>Ventilation company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal Health Flanders</td>
<td>Pharmaceutical company</td>
<td>Sometimes attached to a company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Breeding company</td>
<td>2. AI center</td>
<td>3. Feed mill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact directly</td>
<td>Paid indirectly</td>
<td>Paid directly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Identified barriers for evolution

• Veterinarians regard farmers as reluctant to pay for advice, while most farmers declared to be willing to pay for it
• There is abundance free health advice offered by feed mills
• There is not a strong Flemish Veterinary Union
• A fierce competition exists amid veterinarians
• Complying with current legislation is time consuming but not remunerated
• Veterinarians take a prescriptive expert role to support sales of medicines
• There is often a conflict of interest when giving treatment’s advice

Identified potential solutions

1. To create a third party organization to which farmers would pay a fixed amount per sow per year. Later this organization would pay the veterinarians for their advisory services
2. Decoupling of the dispensation and prescription of medicines and veterinary acts was proposed by most of the farmers interviewed. Whereas most of the veterinarians were very reluctant

Tasks and income of the veterinarian

• The herd veterinarian and the feed mill veterinarian have crucial and complementary roles
• Sale of medications is the main source of income of swine veterinarians
• Most of veterinarians do not directly invoice advice
• The veterinarian is the main advisor about veterinary-related issues
• Most of the contact with the farmer occurs at pre-scheduled visits

Conclusions

• Our results confirm our problem statement – presently veterinarians encounter many difficulties to sell directly advice to pig farmers.
• The way in which income is generated by veterinarians is a reflection of the broader institutional and social context as well as historical factors.
• Presently, the enabling environment does not favour innovation of veterinarians’ business model towards a remunerated advisory role.

Acknowledgments

The Society for Veterinary Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine is acknowledged for supporting the attendance to the 2017 SVEPM Annual Meeting in Inverness.

Contact: cristina.rojogimeno@ilvo.vlaanderen.be