



## **Aims, strategy and ways of working**

### **Overview**

Ruminant Health & Welfare (RH&W) is an independent, industry-based body tasked with helping farmers and stock managers tackle sheep and cattle disease, and build the health and welfare status, resilience and production efficiency of our national flock and herd. RH&W's outcomes underpin industry efforts to meet the UK's Net Zero ambitions and are aligned with responsible antibiotic use. RH&W may also reflect the position of the UK ruminant livestock sector in contributing to both policy development and the public understanding of health and welfare issues.

### **RH&W aims**

To work with the industry to:

- Prevent, manage or eradicate those diseases with the greatest impact on health, welfare and productivity.
- Identify opportunities for practical and effective farm-level interventions that support the UK ambition of being among world leaders in animal welfare.
- Address inherent challenges in current and future farming systems that could lead to health and welfare or reputational challenges.
- Champion high health and welfare standards and other priorities relating to domestic or overseas markets for the UK.

### **RH&W stakeholders**

#### Direct:

- RH&W Steering Group members drawn from farming, farm animal health and welfare, veterinary, governmental, levy body, agricultural supply chain and agricultural service organisations
- The above groups and their members
- Four nations stakeholders, including Chief Veterinary Officer teams
- Academic organisations involved in education or research in farming or veterinary science

#### Indirect:

- Members of the public interested in ruminant health and welfare

### **How RH&W works**

- RH&W shares and co-ordinates information on ruminant health and welfare activity across the four nations, identifying best practice and common goals.
- This allows RH&W to signpost work currently being undertaken, and to identify and prioritise gaps for which it can develop appropriate interventions.
- Interventions may include collaborative projects or seeking funding opportunities.
- RH&W bases its work on science and evidence.
- RH&W will on occasion provide an 'industry position' on an issue, which adds value and provides an evidence-based platform for other respondents.
- RH&W is non-political.

## **RH&W areas of activity**

RH&W's initial focus has been to establish an evidence baseline from which short and medium-term priorities that drive group activity can be identified. This baseline has been compiled from: existing literature, research and reports; a 'grassroots' survey of those working with livestock on a daily basis (soon to be published); the experience and expert evidence from steering group members.

Once priorities have been identified, the most effective and achievable interventions will be implemented or organised. Reactive activities which respond to immediate challenges are also anticipated. The commitment is to balance both the agenda and group time to ensure similar levels of activity across the sheep and cattle sectors while providing meaningful support to other species of farmed ruminants.

Four immediate areas of activity are proposed for RH&W:

### **1. Priority diseases and syndromes**

Main activities will be identified by bringing together the results of the recently-conducted survey with intelligence on other relevant factors in a facilitated workshop. The aim is to prioritise high impact diseases a) which have a significant impact b) are amenable to intervention, and c) for which there is a gap or opportunity RH&W could address.

### **2. High impact/low prevalence diseases**

A working group has been established and has identified a shortlist of diseases or conditions with high impact at a herd or flock level but low prevalence at national level. It is focusing on a) endemic diseases/conditions, and b) diseases which may enter the UK /British Isles. Diseases where RH&W can intervene positively are being identified and an intervention strategy mapped out. The group is also examining horizon scanning and surveillance and monitoring priorities.

### **3. Welfare opportunities**

Through a workshop to be held late spring, opportunities for practical interventions that farmers, stock managers and vets can implement to improve animal welfare on-farm will be identified, and intervention strategies developed.

The workshop aim is to develop a welfare positive checklist that will allow all involved in caring for ruminant livestock to benchmark the welfare status of their own system and, where appropriate, adopt new welfare-positive approaches.

### **4. Future farming systems**

These projects address areas in current practices that present health and welfare risks, and aim to develop future farming systems which lift the bar on health and welfare and, in doing so, improve the sustainability and reputation of the ruminant sector. These are *ad hoc* projects, identified on a case-by-case basis.

Effectiveness of RH&W's activities in these areas and against its aims will be gauged against a set of agreed evaluation measures, to be identified during 2021.