

World antibiotic awareness week and one health highlighted at Veterinary Ireland AGM & Conference

Veterinary Ireland, the representative body for veterinary surgeons in Ireland, held its Annual General Meeting and Conference in the Mullingar Park Hotel, today (Friday 22nd November, 2019). It was officially opened by Andrew Doyle T.D., Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture Food & the Marine.

Commenting on the recent Chinese export contracts secured for the beef industry, Veterinary Ireland President Dr. David MacGuinness MVB MRCVS said that the presence of Temporary Veterinary Inspectors on Irish meat production lines makes an important contribution to quality assurance standards. “The TVI structure provides stability to the veterinary profession whilst the clinical and scientific expertise of vets at ante mortem, post mortem and final inspection stages is a significant selling point when Ireland is trying to secure export markets.”

Speaking in Mullingar Minister Andrew Doyle T.D. said that Veterinary Ireland continues to play a vital role in the delivery of veterinary services throughout the country, thereby contributing to efficiencies at farm level. “Your members also contribute to Ireland’s reputation as an exporter of high quality meat and dairy products. Your ongoing contribution to Animal Health Ireland’s Technical Working Groups and its Implementation Groups is greatly appreciated,” said Minister Doyle.

World antibiotic awareness week

Speaking about ‘Agriculture and Sustainability’, incoming Veterinary Ireland President Conor Geraghty MVB CertDHH warned that the war against the inappropriate or unnecessary use of antibiotics affects everybody.

“Antibiotics have been a cornerstone of modern medicine for both humans and animals. But the overuse and misuse of antibiotics in human and animal health have contributed to the spread of antibiotic resistance. The World Health Organisation has designated this week as World Antibiotic Awareness Week in order to emphasise that the future of antibiotics depends on all of us,” said Conor Geraghty.

The WHO wants to increase global awareness of antibiotic resistance and to encourage best practices among the general public, health workers and policy makers to avoid the further emergence and spread of antibiotic resistance.

“Quite simply, if we don’t take action then we create the risk that we will not have access to critical antibiotics when we most critically need them.”

Conor Geraghty pointed to the Veterinary Ireland Policy Document on Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) which was ratified in May 2014. “We must continue to raise awareness about the importance of this issue. Reducing the use of antimicrobials has been and continues to be a key goal of practicing vets in Ireland, demonstrated by the increasing use of vaccines.”

One health – one big solution

Tommy Heffernan MVB VetCertDHH who is a vet and Nuffield Scholar, spoke in the morning session about ‘One Health – One Big Potential Solution’.

“Reduction in the use of antibiotics, improvement in animal welfare, improvement in environmental efficiency and improved profitability on farms are all areas that are key parts of the One Health global solution for the future – and vets play a pivotal role in all of those areas,” said Tommy Heffernan.

“A new and unprecedented threat is fast emerging that is putting the future of many farmers at risk, not just in Ireland, but across the world,” according to Lorcan Allen, the agribusiness, climate and environmental specialist with the Irish Farmers Journal, who also spoke at the morning session of the Veterinary Ireland conference.

Lorcan Allen said that farmers around the world are losing their social licence to operate because the general public no longer trust them and that this is down to a wide variety of reasons including:

- Environmental impact of farming
- Animal welfare in agriculture
- Climate change

“Irish farmers are also starting to see their social licence to operate come under pressure from the general public due to these same reasons. As such, Irish agriculture needs a new strategy for the years ahead that is fit for purpose and recognises the need to maintain and continuously reinforce a farmer’s social licence to operate,” said Lorcan Allen.

“Social licence is earned through proactive and positive actions over time that build trust between the farmer and the general public. It is time for a mind-set change in the agri-food industry in how we approach these issues and how we communicate them to consumers. A Nuffield Scholar, Lorcan is from a suckler beef farm in Moate on the border of Westmeath and Offaly.

Vet Mary Newman Julian from Co. Tipperary delivered a presentation on the role of policy makers in sustainable agriculture. An afternoon session featured David Green BVSc CertEP MRCVS - Veterinary Defence Society speaking about Veterinary Professional Indemnity Insurance; and financial planning with Mary Goodman Mehigan QFA and Declan Gahan QFA from Veterinary Ireland Financial Services Limited.

New President

The AGM of Veterinary Ireland included a Chief Executive’s report from Finbarr Murphy and saw the formal handover of the chain of office from outgoing Veterinary Ireland President Dr. David MacGuinness MVB MRCVS, Avenue Veterinary Hospital, Dundalk, Co. Louth to incoming President Conor Geraghty MVB CertDHH from Geraghty & Neary Veterinary, a multi site large animal and equine practice in Mountbellew, Co. Galway.

Originally from Fohenagh, a rural village in East Galway, Conor grew up on a farm and graduated in veterinary medicine from UCD in 1999. He bought his local single vet veterinary practice in 2000. Over the past 20 years Conor has grown the practice and amalgamated with neighbouring practices. He graduated with a Cert in Dairy Herd Health from UCD in 2016.

Conor has been actively involved with Veterinary Ireland for many years. His roles there have included helping to launch the Weanling Export Programme in 2007. Conor has been the Food Animal Group county representative for Galway since 2011. As Chair of the Food Animal Group from 2014 – 2019 he co-authored many submissions, most notably Sustainable Animal Health which enabled veterinary involvement in the Rural Development Programme 2015-2020. He was a member of the TVI negotiating team that successfully secured a registered employment agreement with DAFM which was registered in the Labour Court in 2019.

Conor has been an active member on a number of implementation groups in Animal Health Ireland since 2012 and represents Veterinary Ireland on a number of stakeholder groups including iNAP (Irish National Action Plan on Antimicrobial Resistance).

Conor has also been chair of the Cattle Association of Veterinary Ireland (CAVI) since 2014 and has been a strong advocate of high quality CVE for practitioners. The annual CAVI conference is the flagship veterinary conference for large animal vets and he has ambitious plans to grow this event.

ENDS

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