

The future of animal health – five trends for the next five years

By Mark Ross

Animal health products secure a sustainable food supply and are vital to preventing disease in animals as well as people. Ensuring animals are healthy is a core focus of the Health for Animal's global industry network - which includes Agcarm as the New Zealand representative.

How agriculture will maintain and indeed optimise productivity with fewer resources is intrinsically linked to innovative solutions for animal health. The animal health network has identified five trends to help achieve this.

1. Better surveillance systems for disease threat identification

Portable technologies will provide information on the movement and emergence of livestock diseases around the globe. Pilot studies show how farmers, health workers and veterinarians can use smartphone apps to share images and data from sick livestock - allowing for quicker identification and reporting of disease.

2. New technologies will improve how we treat disease

Satellite data is used to map rainfall across huge expanses of land. This helps predict future patterns of disease such as Rift Valley fever, which is heavily influenced by climatic conditions. Researchers are exploring the use of 'Smart' ear tags – small devices that can continuously broadcast an animal's movements. As sick animals become less active, they provide warnings of impending disease outbreaks.

3. More emphasis on animal welfare

If animals are to enjoy a reasonable quality of life, maintaining their health is necessary to improving their welfare.

4. Greater collaboration between the private and public sector

Recent incidents of bluetongue and Schmallenberg in animals, and the Ebola virus in humans, show that progress can be made when publicly-funded research institutions and the product development skills of the private sector combine.

5. More treatments available for all

Humanity's growing appetite for animal protein may mean the health of minor species becomes ever more important. Finding new medicinal products and better quality environments for fish farming operations, for example, will become crucial.

- Mark Ross is chief executive of Agcarm, the industry association for companies which manufacture and distribute crop protection and animal health products.