Diary of a poultry intern

Poultry intern William Garton has been at another conference, only this time as a speaker. ‘Poultry on the piste’ is Minster Veterinary Practice’s week-long conference that combines CPD with snow sports.

This month’s conference was a bit different; not only was I a speaker rather than a delegate, but it was held in the Austrian Alps. The morning and evening lectures were delivered by speakers from the poultry industry, allowing free time during the day for enjoying the slopes and discussing current industry issues while taking the chair lifts.

The lectures covered topics such as the future of poultry feed, commodities trends and expectations, and insights into the world of genetics and breeding companies. I received an insight into potential feed and protein sources in 30 years time, gained a better appreciation for the size, scale and specifics of broiler breeding, and learnt about the future potential for countries such as Brazil to drive the global production of poultry.

I also gave two talks, taking on two challenging topics that sparked debate among the delegates. ‘Antibiotic reduction in the broiler sector’ is a recurring theme at poultry discussion meetings. I tried to put an alternative spin on my talk by covering the challenges we face as veterinarians as a result of the pharmacological dynamic and kinetic properties of the antibiotics we have licensed and the decision-making process we go through, based on farm history, disease presentation and bacterial culture and sensitivity. I also covered factors such as cost-benefit and EU legislation. Lecturing on pharmacology and business finances wasn’t something I expected to be doing in my first job!

In my second talk, I brought up the hot topic of beak trimming in layers. My intention was to give an update on the impending beak trimming ban, informing delegates of the research completed so far, offering proposals for alternatives to beak trimming and when legislative outcomes can be expected. Others in the room had far more experience and I think I learnt as much by giving this talk as I did by writing it. The first point raised by an audience member was the uncertainty in the name of this procedure – tipping, trimming or treatment? The response, based on advice from a research group at University of Bristol, was that a draft report on the latest projects had been presented to the Beak Trimming Action Group in London in March. At this stage, some final data are still awaited, but the final report is due to presented to Defra by the end of April for peer review, and until such time the information gained from the 2012/15 projects remains confidential. I can appreciate the frustration and anxiety that this matter is causing among the layer farming community.

Skiing and snowboarding were enjoyed by all, thanks to the range of slopes and runs in St Anton and the lovely weather. There were a few red noses, but fortunately no major injuries.

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