

FARM ANIMAL WELL-BEING

Changing behaviours towards pain management around calving



Whether it is an assisted or natural birth, all calvings undoubtedly cause some level of pain for the cow and potentially, the calf. But despite this, the views and strategies adopted by farmers and veterinarians towards pain management can vary greatly, and as such, so can the welfare of the animal.

With this in mind, this year's 14th annual Expert Forum on Farm Animal Well-Being – held in Porto – brought together over 70 delegates from 15 countries to share their knowledge and the latest research on how the sector can make calving more comfortable.

Following presentations on some of the most cutting-edge research, the afternoon session of the Forum saw delegates work together in an interactive workshop to delve deeper into how veterinarians can help farmers better understand pain during parturition, and as a result, influence changes in attitudes towards managing pain.

Behavioural science and behaviour change programmes

To influence a change in behaviour, specific components need to be in place, as explained by Dr Claire Windeyer from the University of Calgary, who led the workshop.

Helping farmers and veterinarians better understand and manage pain associated with assisted calving has been a long-term focus for Boehringer Ingelheim.

At this year's event, Boehringer Ingelheim presented their Behaviour Change Program – "Invigilo" – which has been developed through a partnership with Cambridge-based consultancy agency Innovia Technology. The project has centred around using the principles of behavioural science to modify veterinarian and farmer behaviours, in a bid to minimise the pain that may be inflicted during assisted calving, through a comprehensive set of specific interventions.

These interventions aim to target the drivers and barriers to change. "It's really easy to tell clients, or farmers, what to do, but often the behavioural change is harder.

"Knowledge doesn't necessarily change behaviour if the motivation, capability and opportunity to display this new behaviour isn't there" explained Dr Windeyer.

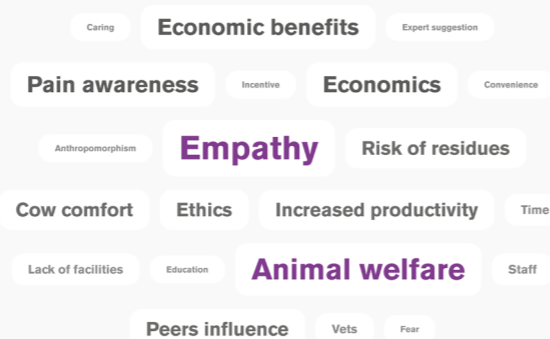
Motivators and barriers

To kick start the interactive part of the workshop, and to turn the focus specifically to pain management, delegates were asked to give their thoughts on motivators and barriers to both veterinarians and farmers addressing pain at calving.

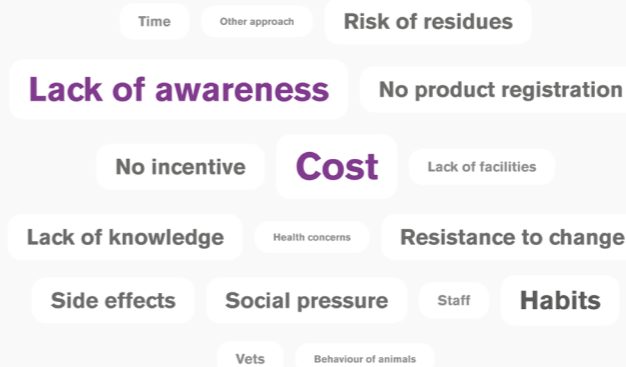
When it came to the drivers that motivate producers and veterinarians to mitigate pain, key reasons included empathy, welfare, economics, pride and ethics.

With regards to barriers, these were deemed as cost, lack of knowledge from producers, and veterinarians fearing reproach from clients who were unwilling to change.

What are the drivers that motivate producers to manage calving pain?



What are the barriers that cause producers to not manage calving pain?



Creating empathy

Though empathy was flagged as a key driver for both farmers and veterinarians to address pain, and one significant part of a behavioural change approach, experience shows that it may not always be sufficient to modify practices on all farms, said Dr Windeyer. "Producers do have the empathy for their cattle, but that doesn't necessarily always translate to changing their actions. So how can we get them to take that empathy, act upon it, and make some changes?"

Therefore, delegates were then split into eight groups and tasked with designing a tool to increase empathy and desire to follow best-practice pain management during assisted calving which would encourage producers to make calving more comfortable.

Dr Windeyer said: "This could be anything, including, but not limited to, a communication tool, an activity or a strategy. The goal is to incite behaviour change among producers – and vets – within your sphere."

Delegates got very creative with their designs – with everything from smartphone apps to pain-inducing sensors to 'shock' farmers into understanding the reality of the pain felt during calving. However, the majority of tools were based around using artificial intelligence and simulation of pain.

Some of the suggestions included a virtual reality game to help recognise the signs of a calving cow and where a problem could arise, with 'points' awarded when farmers solved the problem, while another team felt a 'Strava of pain management' type tool which visualised pain levels – based on a sensor fitted to the cow – would help further better understand pain during parturition. Delegates believed that turning an everyday situation into a game, or something visual, could help better signal the opportunities and motivation to reduce pain during calving.

Further development

The insights gathered during the workshop session provide valuable information in Boehringer Ingelheim's quest to change the way pain during assisted calving is recognized and managed, concluded Boehringer Ingelheim's Megan Whitesell

"A smooth delivery minimises consequences such as offspring mortality and poor reproduction or early lactation performance. Farmers can further demonstrate their duty of care by reducing pain during assisted calving and promoting cow comfort and well-being.

"Reducing pain is rewarding from both the perspective of economics and cattle well-being."



For more information about this forum and past events, visit: www.farmanimalwellbeing.com

