

Developments in herd health

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The future developments in herd health issues are dependant on certain clear trends. The herds become larger, animal trade increases and outside employees become more usual. This means increased demands on herd management and also herd health management. Increasing cost of barns and the competition on the markets means that optimal barn building can become difficult.

Cow and calf mortality seems to increase as herds become larger. The pressure from infectious diseases, due to increased animal trade and larger herds and groups, increases. It can be more difficult to keep the use of antibiotics on an acceptable level as the mastitis problems continue in various degrees. Routine postpartum endometritis treatments with antibiotics has become "handy" in large herds.

The fertility probably continues to decrease. We see it as an increased calving interval. There are less people for heat detection in larger groups of animals. New techniques are of course available in helping out, but as we all know, the increased production has a negative correlation on fertility. We try to keep up the race in the breeding programs, but the calving interval seems to increase anyway. The development in hormonal treatments is question mark.

Preventive herd health management increases. About 1/3 of the herds in Finland have joined the NASEVA system developed for herd health management. The breeding for better udder health and better fertility hopefully increases. The process of understanding how to build better loose housing barns will continue. The best barns are very good already today, but there is still room for improvement. The most crucial matters are space/animal and group size. The physical workload of the farmers has decreased remarkably with the new techniques, which of course is a splendid development. Milking robots usually mean more time for the animals and hopefully also the family.

The risk of infectious diseases increases with the increased trade, larger herds and groups. Some new diseases (e.g. Bluetongue) seem to appear as the climate warms up. With the movement to loose housing and increased animal trade, we see an increase in infectious claw diseases in Finland. The risk of for example foot- and mouth disease increase, because people travel so much.

Animal welfare will be a central issue also in the future. In Finland we move from tie-stall barns to loose housing systems. Animal welfare indexes will become a way to measure the situation in the herd and communicate it to the consumers. Cow and calf mortality, some disease incidences / prevalences and the possibilities for exercise will probably some of the parameters.

Some consumers will become more knowledgeable about the origin of food and how it is produced. Locally produced will be an important sales argument. Food produced little or no medicines and chemicals will become more important. Animal welfare will become an important parameter for good quality.