



# FARMERS VOICES

Farmers own words on how they achieve success with whole health strategies



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**After starting with 20 ewes Lynnie and her husband established a 150 acre mixed organic farm in 1999. They have a small Hereford, beef suckler herd with two calvings a year and lamb 150 ewes outside in April. These are a mix of Suffolk, Texel, and lleys. The farm has some permanent pasture and some arable land in rotation.**

Lynnie is now training to be a WHAg farm complementary health adviser so that she can support other farmers wishing to take a whole health farm approach.

By nature I am quite a sceptical person but I'm also prepared to try anything (within reason), to see if it can improve our farming practice. In the early days, I had the luxury of knowing the first ewes really well. I first started using homeopathy after being dissatisfied with being unable to do anything when I could see something was not quite right with an animal, but yet nothing was conventionally wrong enough to need a vet.



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I wasn't prepared to wait and see what developed or to hear 'well if it was a race horse we'd know more about it but really there's not that much research on sheep'. In my mind the animal was entitled to better than that. If I feel off colour I can do something about it. Of course for good reasons we fence and house animals away from the things they would use naturally to make themselves better, Ash bark for its anti-inflammatory properties, willow for aches and fevers; perhaps you have reached for its derivative aspirin in the past. Next time you're nursing a sick animal, give it some hedgerow branches and note which ones it takes.

In searching for ways to improve the flock's health and vitality, I brought a small book by Mark Elliott, 'Homeopathy for Shepherds' and then three veterinary homeopathy books by George Macleod. I found them great for starting out with if you have no knowledge of homeopathy, as they are written from a conventional perspective.

## Early Successes

I particularly remember a case some years ago when a ewe broke her back leg above and below the joint, probably in a rabbit hole. The vet said it was best to shoot her or, although if she wasn't in too much pain I could give her pain relief to get her lambs a few more days with her first. She had twins just a couple of days old and she was standing for them to drink. She didn't appear to be in much pain. Desperate to give her a chance I consulted the homeopathic books and we decided to start treating her, with homeopathic remedies and a splint. Within a few days she was putting weight on, and in weeks made a full recovery. Within 2 months others could not have picked her out of the flock, even if you put a dog around them and made them move at speed. You can't do a double blind trial and break her other leg just to see if it would have healed as well and as fast without the remedies. You wouldn't do that to check with conventional treatments either. The important thing is, the ewe recovered, the lambs had their mum, so no time was needed for bottle feeding and there were no complications. She went on to lamb for many more years all, of which is a positive outcome for the farm business as a whole.

Our success with this has helped us treat other broken bones including my own foot, and many years later when our sheepdog pup jumped six feet out of his run then had a 'fight' with the tractor wheel, breaking his pelvis. We instantly reached for homeopathy to support the vet's treatments. The vets were amazed at his speed of recovery compared to what they would normally expect, and didn't even bother with later x-rays to check him as they could see how well he was doing. He works today on the farm and is as fast and agile as any of the other dogs.

## The Quest for Deeper Knowledge

The many successes we had early on encouraged us and gave us confidence, but also left us with more questions and a thirst for deeper knowledge. Things we'd used with success once or twice, such as remedies to deal with cuts, bruises, shock, Orf or foot rot, became our 'go to' solution for that problem.

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It also enabled us to treat things on first suspicion before they became a real problem in the conventional sense. In time, as the flock's vitality increased, we had fewer of these basic problems - nowadays it's very rare for us to have them at all.

We were now able to treat sheep who seemed a bit off colour but had not yet developed a disease with a conventional diagnosis. Then in a search for things to help the sheep have excellent health rather than just absence of disease, we started exploring homeopathy more. Luckily I spotted an advert for a farm homeopathy course, and even though time away from a small farm makes the logistics difficult and the expense, although not big, needs to be considered against all the other calls on farm finance, I signed up immediately.

I have to admit I was a bit apprehensive, but the course helped me string together the bits I'd gleaned from various books and my own experience. After I'd done the course we suffered an outbreak of pink eye at lambing time which came on very quickly. Helped by homeopathic vet, Chris Aukland (Head of WHAg's Livestock Health Programmes) we were able to treat them successfully and much faster than other local farms with the same problem taking a conventional route.

### **Successful Cases**

I guess lambing is the time when we use homeopathy the most frequently and the veterinary students from the Royal Veterinary College who come for lambing experience have been very interested in the homeopathic approach too. After a difficult lambing and the giving of some remedies they are frequently surprised at the lack of further complications for ewe or lamb.

In the early days, threatened with a difficult situation, the confidence to give the remedies a go could sometimes be a difficult decision. For example, we had a case of sudden lamb mortality which proved to be 'Pulpy Kidney'. The vet recommended we should vaccinate the whole flock, he also said that stress could kill more of them.

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These are serious things to weigh up, I felt that the implications were complex, bringing in all the ewes and such young lambs to vaccinate them would stress them a lot. The vaccination could not be used on lambs under 4 weeks, so they would need to come in twice so that we could do the whole flock. Immunity from the vaccine takes 6 weeks, so we were warned to expect further losses during that time. No one could answer my questions about the efficacy of the vaccination, the percentage that would die due to stress of coming in to be vaccinated or the percentage that could still die anyway. For us these were important factors to be considered. I rang another homeopath vet for advice and support, and decided to use a homeopathic nosode immediately, it caused no stress to the flock as it went in the water trough and there were no more fatalities at all. We can never know what would have happened if we had chosen to get the whole flock in and vaccinate and, had we had lots more deaths after trying the nosode the vaccination option would still have been there, thankfully we didn't need it.

As the years go by and our knowledge increases and so does our confidence that we are making the right decisions. For us it's not been about costs but as I think back over these few examples I realise we have also saved a fortune. Remedies are cheap, the knowledge takes a time to learn but a good stock person already has fantastic observation skills. They just have to be open to try something different and react to what they see in a different way.

In summary, I'd say the results in our flock have more than convinced us of the worth of homeopathy. We have been able to deal with new problems quickly and with confidence, discussing and questioning issues with our conventional vets. When we go back through the vet med records at our annual Soil Association inspection it's heartening to see how few entries there are now and interesting to see the list of homeopathic remedies which we have used to good effect.

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