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DIAGNOSTICS OF SHEEP – BEYOND THE TREATMENT OF ANIMALS

Diagnostics of animals should start by looking at individual animals, followed by investigating the flock and the farm as a whole and ending by analysing cultivated crops and the management of the soil. Often this results in an overall conclusion and insight in an integrated problem exposing potential changes in the management and possibilities of farming practices. Treatment of a sick animal might be necessary. But it should always be done while considering possible underlying causes and advising the farmer more profoundly while supporting his decision making process. By this the role of the veterinarian will develop into a strong collaboration with the farmer to search for a higher economic return, opportunities for management decisions while creating a higher social support in the society. A “circular approach” in this is evidently important. It should not be looked upon as a hype, but as a basis for higher efficiency and income while enabling the farmer to better face challenges and restraints such as new rules and regulations. Economic return can possibly be generated from ecosystem services such as carbon credits, biodiversity and the production of healthy food. In order to serve the farmer in the best way possible it is important to go beyond a sick animal and look at all aspects of the farm. In this regard the potential role of the vet should not be underestimated.

The importance of a healthy soil is more and more recognized. The economic return of a dairy farm depends strongly on the production of the farm itself. Notwithstanding ongoing research many aspects from below the ground are still not fully understood. What we do know is the necessity to increase the effective organic matter content of the soil. Many possible approaches are available to enhance this of which making Bokashi is a very important one. Bokashi is the process of fermenting organic waste before returning it to the soil and it proves to be very effective (Westeinde, van 't, J., W.S. Otter en T. van Dijk, 2016). The efficiency of manure application can also be improved by fermenting it first.

The relation between a healthy soil and animal health aspects will be addressed in this presentation. The objective is more efficient recycling of minerals in the soil-plant-animal-manure complex. Within this cycle the unique and important role of micro-organisms is being recognized and supported. The final target is a more natural way of farming. Changing social demands and perception strongly affect the future of the farmer and his enterprise. The path towards an increased farm size and decreasing cost is more and more recognized as a cul-de-sac, i.e. a race to the bottom. Therefore the future of the farmer and his farm depends much more on the production of healthy food, a production system with respect for the environment and a local market with a fair price for his products (Michiel Wagener, Triodos, 2018).

The special relationship of the veterinarian with the farmer, based on knowledge, respect and loyalty, will be addressed as well. A subscription system with a strong and loyal relationship between the vet and the farmer should be promoted. A more or less fixed group of customers, transparency in costs and an easily accessible veterinarian might result in less dependency of the clinic of the sale of products. The vet will be recognized more for the advice and added value to the farmer. Moreover the vet will be able to play an integrated role in the farm and act together with the farmer towards society.

References

- J. van 't Westeinde, W.S. Otter en T. van Dijk, 2016, Bokashi als bodemverbeteraar, Resultaten van het veldonderzoek 2013-2016, rapport 205
- Wagener, M., 2018, Schaalvergroting landbouw is race to the bottom, Bio-Journaal, 10 januari 2018, Triodos Bank