Veterinary Component Costs on Irish Dairy Farms – A Pilot Study

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In recent years a perception has arisen among farmers that vet costs are increasing at a disproportionate rate to that of other variable costs at a time when net profit from milk production is falling. However, it is not clear what components of vet costs are contributing to this rise. The objective of this study was to design a recording format to capture vet component costs (VCC) where interrogation of agricultural databases (ePM, DairyMIS, CSO, dairy co-ops) revealed that none contain comprehensive VCC. A Delphi technique was used to collate expert opinions of Teagasc research, advisory and farm management staff and private veterinarians on a new recording format which was then tested by on-farm interview. The re-drafted format was distributed to experts and the format again re-drafted and re-tested by on-farm interview. The format separates enterprise types and includes stock type and numbers, vet problems, visit, services and product fees. Within each cost category, subcategories are itemised, e.g. tail paint, scanning and drugs under infertility. A pilot study showed that mastitis was the highest ranked VCC. Vet costs per cow and per farm ranged between €51 and 87 and €2,106 and €8,011, respectively, for herds of 31 to 120 cows. This study identified the limitations of existing databases and achieved its objective in generating and pilot-testing a new VCC recording format. A database of such costs needs to be constructed and analysed before the issue of why vet costs may be rising disproportionately on Irish dairy farms can be addressed.

Keywords: costs, veterinary, animal disease, Delphi technique