

Q & A

Veterinary Sustainability
An introduction with Vet Sustain



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Motivated to help all veterinary stakeholders take control of their sustainability through access to education and leadership — Gudrun is a past president of the British Veterinary Association.

CHAMPIONING A GREENER

PRACTICE ENVIRONMENT

With greater importance and urgency around workplace sustainability, many veterinary teams are driving change to support a greener way of life for their veterinary practice. Covetrus caught up with Gudrun Ravetz, industry expert and Vet Sustain Director. We asked for her insights on the sustainability movement in the veterinary space.

Q1: What inspired you to get involved with Vet Sustain?

My experience in the veterinary industry has allowed me to appreciate the unique privilege that we in the veterinary profession hold. We are at the interface of the One Health agenda and a key touch point for environmental, animal and human wellbeing. As a past president of the British Veterinary Association and of The Society of Practising Veterinary Surgeons, I also appreciate the force and positive impact the profession can play for good across these areas. I believe if we work together, we can really make a difference.

When Vet Sustain formed, I felt inspired. It was brilliant to see a group of people coming together, many of whom I already knew and respected, and I knew this was exactly what the profession needed. Sustainability initiatives need the right leadership and infrastructure to work. Even with the right will and

motivation, teams need guidance and a framework from which to start. That was the piece that was missing and Vet Sustain can provide. To be asked to join at the very beginning was exciting, a privilege and an opportunity to make a difference.

We are all volunteers at Vet Sustain, which I think is incredible. In our industry, we know it can be hard work finding the time to volunteer, but if you are passionate about something, there's that motivation to do it and there are always learnings to take from each experience. Giving your time often means getting something back in return, whether that's learning a new skill or meeting a new person or achieving something you didn't think was possible. Volunteering can be a time-juggle but it's such a rich opportunity for self-learning and can often lead on to other positive things.

Q2: Can you tell us about the Greener Veterinary Checklist?

Getting started with sustainability for your veterinary practice can be daunting.

For many practices, challenges around sustainability can seem paralysing, so even if you have the motivation and the will, people often just don't know where to start. Completely understandable in our profession, we need to know all the evidence first which means it can be hard to get going and can lead to analysis paralysis.

The Greener Practice Checklist was created by Vet Sustain, in partnership with BVA, BVNA and SPVS. It outlines the points a veterinary practice may consider to become more sustainable and provides links to available guidance and green options. A lot of work from our volunteers went into laying down an infrastructure which will help veterinary teams identify a place to start. To avoid information overload, we focused on providing our guidance in bite sized chunks and signposting independent resources from trusted organisations and associations.

It has been great to see our volunteers come together, work so hard on a project and then get to see the final output of their combined and collaborative effort. The checklist does not dictate what is right or wrong, because every practice is different. It provides assistance and a framework to get started. We hope it makes the knowledge more accessible.

Q3: How do you feel attitudes to sustainability have changed in the veterinary industry?

I think attitudes around sustainability have shifted in the veterinary industry. What was once seen as a "nice to do" is now a "have to do." Sustainability initiatives are now less niche and many in the profession feel they too can be involved in making the change.

When it comes to business, sustainability has moved from a side-line to a business pillar across many industries. Attitudes have shifted from sustainability being seen as more important in certain sectors of the profession to it being a pan-professional issue that we can all tackle together.

This shift includes looking at sustainability from all strands too, from wellbeing of people to social sustainability, which can often be forgotten. We know that employees and customers are looking for businesses which reflect their own values, ethics and morals and sustainability in both the social and environmental sphere are key to this.

Collectively it feels like we have gone from saying, we need to do something – to okay, we are going to do something.

Q5: For those looking to take their first steps, what advice would you give?

Making change on your own can be hard work and lonely. Therefore, my advice would be to establish a core group (even if it's only two of you!) and to understand the help and resources available to you. A few below:

- [Greener Veterinary Practice Checklist](#)
- [BVA's Good Workplace Guide](#)
- [Davies Veterinary Specialist Environmental Policy](#)

Once you have your team, your next step is to make a plan and using the Greener Veterinary Practice Checklist can help. What we want veterinary teams to understand

Q6: In which key sustainability areas can veterinary teams make the biggest impact?

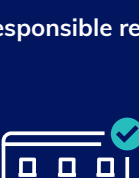
If you are looking at the macro level, one of the biggest areas is your heating, fuelling and transport. These key areas can have a big impact, if you make radical changes. But if you can't make these changes right now, don't give up as there are so many things you can do.

One thing we really shouldn't forget is the education value of a veterinary. As trusted advisors we can have a huge impact on every animal owner, keeper and customer who comes into contact with our practice. With our advice and platform, we can make significant differences beyond our practice footprint.

[Check out the Greener Veterinary Practice Checklist for Vet Sustain's 4 key sustainability areas.](#)



Practice responsible resource use



Be sustainable in your operation



Use medicines responsibly



Empower the team

Q4: What does a sustainable veterinary practice look like?

Sustainability can mean different things to different people but for me, it means that you can carry on doing what you are doing today, tomorrow and into the future without having a negative impact on the environment, those around you and generations to come.

While it would be fantastic for all practices to be carbon zero with minimal waste, we must be realistic and understand that every veterinary practice is different. For me, becoming sustainable starts with the motivation, will and adaptability to change – that's what a sustainable veterinary practice should look like now and it must be one that is taking action. We need to be careful not to set the bar too high and allow practices to take that first step forward. It starts with small changes from everyone which can lead to the really big changes we need.

Q7: How can vet leaders inspire others and champion change around sustainability?

Leaders first need to take sustainability seriously and genuinely empower those who are passionate enough to take this forward. Leaders also need to embrace change and willingness to adapt, it cannot be words only. We know when it comes to motivation, satisfaction and retention, employees look upwards. This means there is a lot we can do as leaders to recognise, inspire and celebrate sustainability as important to our businesses and to our people.

There is also a huge amount of value in veterinary teams looking to their peers for inspiration. As we share clinical knowledge, we should share how we are operating in the sphere and inspire each other to make positive changes. Sharing positive stories as well as what hasn't worked so well between teams can be incredibly useful. Building this network of like-minded professionals all championing a similar goal can be incredibly powerful.

Q8: What's next for Vet Sustain? How can we get involved and support the change?

Our next step is to raise further awareness of The Greener Veterinary Practice Checklist and ensure it is actioned. We also want to see the change percolate upwards and outwards to leadership and other businesses.

We have some ambitious goals, one of which is getting 50% of businesses engaged and using sustainable practice toolkits by 2025. We believe normalising sustainability and environmentalism across the veterinary profession is a benefit to us all.

We are always looking for supporters and partners to help us on our mission, so I'd encourage those passionate about creating change to engage with us.

- Visit our [website](#) for a range of information, webinars and resources all freely available
- Join our social media community and share your ideas and stories with us

[Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [LinkedIn](#)

About Vet Sustain:

Vet Sustain is an organisation supporting veterinary professionals and vet led teams to drive change towards a more sustainable future. Their mission is to enable and inspire veterinary professionals to work to secure the wellbeing of animals, people and the natural world

Sustainable Inspiration

Covetrus' Practice Management System can help you with your sustainable efforts; everything from being a [paperless practice](#) to reducing stock wastage, as well as increasing efficiencies. Duncan McGinness achieved far better control over their inventory and increased overall productivity.

[Download your Greener Practice Checklist here](#)

[See Case Study](#)



<https://vetsustain.org/>

